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BEM-15

15p

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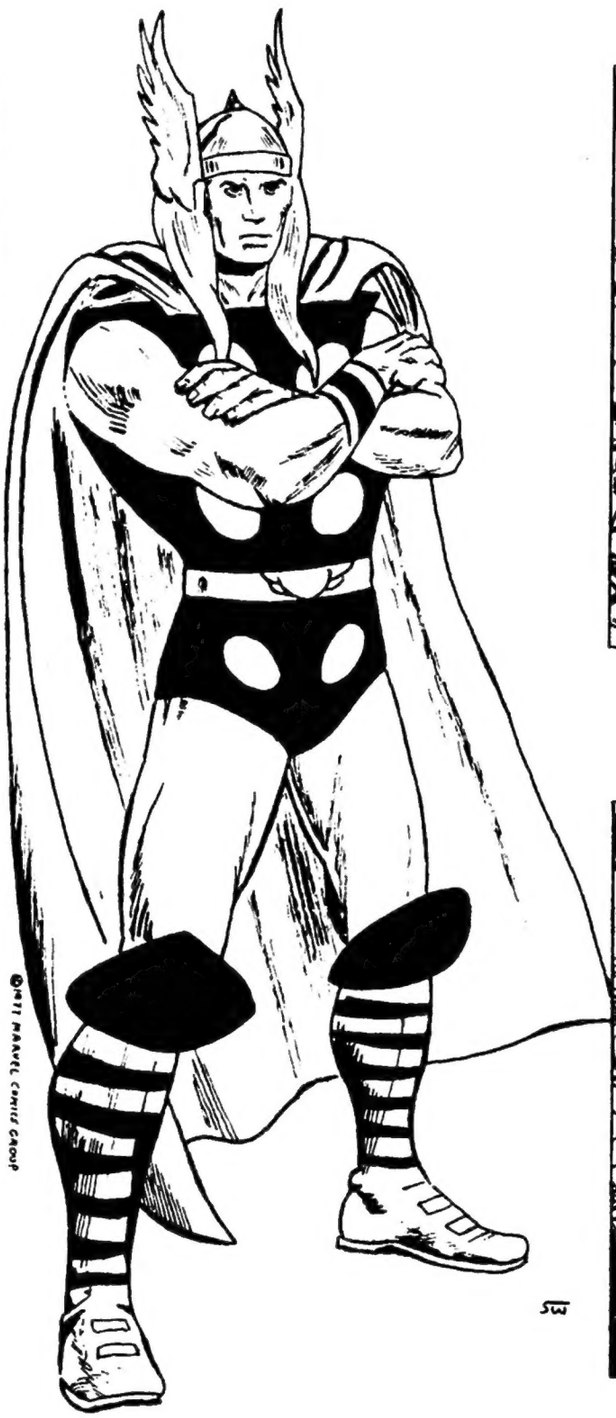

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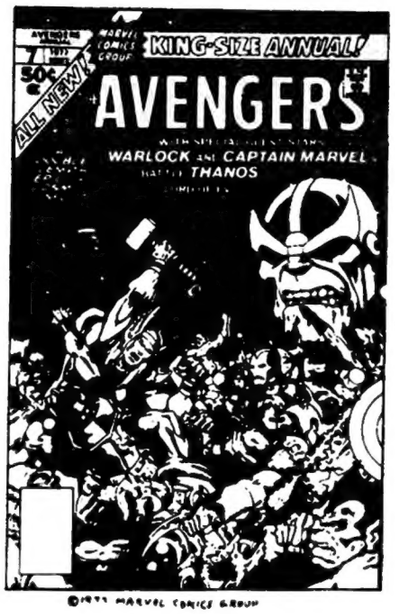

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BEM-15 - September 1977

editor - Martin Lock

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Steven J. Green: 16
Al Matheson: 17 (inks, left)
Joe Matthews: 18 (left)
Terry Moore: 8 (strip)
Nick Neocleous: 8 (upper), 15
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Martin Noone: 5 (both)
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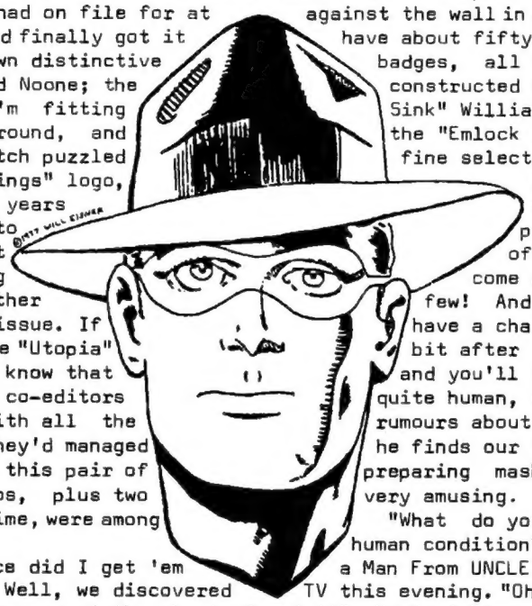
BEMUSINGS

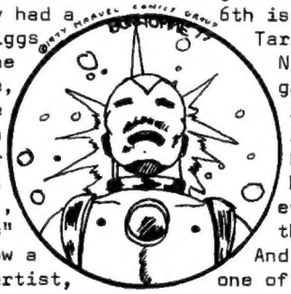
And that's another issue of Bem put together; and, as I expect you will have seen, our logo now reads "Bem", rather than "Bemusing Magazine"--or, for that matter, any other name we've hidden behind, with the possible, nay probable, exception of "Bamboozling Magazine Weird Trash Unspecial", one of the less simple titles that poor old Superswipe had to turn into one of his special logos.

Talking of our longest-serving ace artist, you'll notice slightly more of his art in this issue than we've managed to get of late -- the Batman drawing I've had on file for at least a year, and finally got it inked, in his own distinctive style, by Gerard Noone; the Spirit head I'm fitting these words around, and the winsome witch puzzled by the "Fan-Things" logo, were done two years ago, and sent to a fanzine that was then getting material together for its first issue. If you remember the "Utopia" affair, you'll know that one of the two co-editors disappeared with all the material that they'd managed to gather, and this pair of Superswipe illos, plus two more for next time, were among the "loot".



So which fence did I get 'em from, you ask? Well, we discovered recently a xerox copy of the sheet of art, and Superswipe re-inked it where necessary--result, instant Superswipe artwork, vintage August 1975.

Connoisseurs of fanzine nostalgia may be wafted back over three years by our centre-spread; in those days, the major source of imported comics was an organisation operating under the code-name "Unicorn", and when it came to advertising, they had a very nice line in Mike Higgs centre-spreads. And now the mists of time swirl, fade, and clear again, and the Mighty Unicorn has been put out to graze, in favour of Birmingham's cultural centre (for comics fans), the "Nostalgia & Comics" pair of shops; Mike is now a nationally-known comic artist, drawing his own daily newspaper strip, but he still managed to draw a brand-new centre-spread ad for Phil Clarke and his partners in comics-selling--and for us, yes?



Twenty pages of Bem this time--but that's just our summer weight, with extra ads and, hopefully, extra sales at the Comicon. We'll be back down to our usual 16 pages next time, barring unforeseen circumstances -- a regular 20-page issue would mean a price-rise, and there are quite enough of those around at the moment already!

But, if you're reading this at the convention, Comicon 77 -- which would mean that your money's run out, I'd guess -- welcome to the event of the year. I don't know what Rambunctious Rob Barrow, Omnipotent Organiser and Miraculous Master of Ceremonies, has arranged, beyond the usual films and dealers tables, but there must be the usual talks and panels arranged; just don't forget the informal moments, talking to fellow fans and comparing purchases. For a couple of days, you are in a world where reading comics is a normal activity -- make the most of it, hey? I should perhaps mention that the fellow wearing the badge reading "No, I'm not Nige Edwards--how dare you!" is very probably Nige, and that our couple of tables, down against the wall in the far corner, have about fifty more assorted badges, all thought up and constructed by K. "Kitchen-Sink" Williams. And as usual the "Emlock Tables" have a fine selection of the new imports, all at remarkably low prices, and lots of back issues--come and purchase a few! And if you want to have a chat, come back a bit after the main rush, and you'll find that we're quite human, despite all the rumours about Nige, and how he finds our "human" ways of preparing mashed potatoes so very amusing.

"What do you think of the human condition?" someone asked a Man From UNCLE in the film on TV this evening. "Oh, I'm in favour of it", Mr Kuriakin replied...

I don't know about you, but "Made In Britain" has certainly influenced my comics buying; I'm buying not only the Marvel weeklies now, but also 2000 AD, which I've followed from its first issue, ACTION, BULLET, and the 12p weekly TARZAN. Even if you don't buy it regularly, it's worth looking through it when you see it; the August 6th issue has a complete 15-page Tarzan tale with art by Alex Nino, and other material gaining its first English-language publication has included work by not only Russ Manning and Mike Royer but also Will Meugniot and even Mike Ploog -- a lot of the scripts are by Don Glut. And today I lashed out £1 on one of the first 1978 Annuals--on August 6th?!--ACTION ANNUAL 1978. And compared with most other annuals, with 144 pages that's a bargain. I just hope Mr Lanihorne doesn't try to claim for his expenses after he does his shopping for the next column!

To fill up these last few lines, I would like to stress that I do like to receive letters, including comments not for printing -- but please don't expect a reply every time, and if you do need a reply, please enclose an S.A.E., or at least a stamp. My post bill's huge enough as it is! -Martin

Well, you'll have seen by now our new logo on the cover--and our tame logo-designer is anxious for your opinion on it, as well as the new logos for "Rich Morrissey's America" and "Sigh". In fact, we're all looking forward to your views on this Bem, and indeed on comicdom in general--we have lots of space in "Reaction" next time to fill, and we don't want a 4-page back issue ad there instead, do we?

Since Bem is published five times a year (and actually seems to appear more often than most of the bimonthly fanzines--but that's their problem), there'll be a gap of an extra month before Bem-16, which will be out in the second half of November. This will get Bem and CMN back to appearing in alternate months, which is useful for all news-fanciers!

What's in store in Bem next time? Well, Ruan will be taking a deep breath and a ten-pound note, and investigating the new crop of Annuals in the shops for "Made In Britain"--and, if all goes well, we'll see the debut of a new column, and a new contributor--he bought ACTION #1 in 1938 when it first came out, and now writes the longest-running column in fandom, in the oldest continuing fanzine. So you'd better make sure of your Bem-16 now...

...and, what better way to do that, says he sneakily, than to send in £1 for a five-issue subscription to Bem? It means that you will get your Bem as soon as it's printed -- before any of the comics shops! And if you want some Bem back issues too, have a quick flip to page 16 first.

And with any luck Nige will be back with us for our next go-round; the high summer activity in Bridlington has kept him too busy to join in this time. -176-671

NEWS

Some big changes for Howard the Duck are due--first of all he's changing into a MAN for a couple of issues, and after this his features will be slightly different, to avoid any trouble with the Disney organisation, for similarities to their Donald Duck. Steve Gerber is giving up writing the colour HTD comic--he will remain its editor, and write not only Howard's daily strip, but also a new black & white magazine starring Howard!

A probable HTD weekly means the colour book is likely not to come over at 12p in future; a new monthly British Edition of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN is to appear in October, with 52 pages for 35p--the American magazine will no longer be imported. A new weekly with full-length FF adventures means that FANTASTIC FOUR will leave the schedule of 12p monthlies soon; a probable SF title means goodbye to STAR WARS too. FURY ends with #25, the shortest-lived weekly that Marvel UK have issued, bar one.

Steve Gerber and Jim Starlin have finished a MAN-THING story for (probably) a future issue of RAMPAGING HULK. Starlin is concentrating on magazine and book cover paintings now, with Roger Stern & Tom Sutton taking over DR STRANGE. He's done the cover for CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND, RAMPAGING HULK #7, and MARVEL PREVIEW 12, which spotlights UFOs with a 35-page strip by Kraft & Trimpe, plus UFO-sighting features. Issue 13 will have "Warriors of Eternity"--the artist is Mike Golden.

Marvel's first 80-page colour dollar comic, MAN FROM ATLANTIS (from a new TV show), is written by Bill Mantlo, with art chores split between Robbins & Sutton. Only #1 is in the thick format--issue 2 on are normal size.

The "Kiss" $1.50 magazine has gone into a 2nd printing; next for this full-colour format is a special issue of SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN late this year.

STAR WARS continues past the 6-issue film adaptation, still by Thomas, Chaykin & Leialoha; the first 6 issues may well be given a 2nd printing, as well as becoming two Treasury Editions.

ETERNALS finishes with #19, and CHAMPIONS with #17 -- after this they'll appear in AVENGERS and then disband, with Hercules joining THOR for a while, and Black Widow rejoining a certain Man Without Fear. THE X-MEN may be going monthly soon...

Marv Wolfman is producing some multi-character fill-ins, such as Captain America, Iron Man & Black Panther and Spider-Man, Thing & Torch -- they'll appear in whichever character's book needs them. Satana and the Son of Satan will guest-star in TOMB OF DRACULA soon; Marv has also scripted "WHAT IF Someone Else Became Nova", with 5 possible answers. NOVA will go bimonthly with #15, with Carmine Infantino taking over the art--he's also the new penciller for DEFENDERS and THE MAN FROM ATLANTIS.

Dave Cockrum is drawing fill-in issues for JOHN CARTER, MS MARVEL, and SPIDER-MAN.

"The Man In The Iron Mask" is not being done in the series of MARVEL CLASSICS COMICS--instead "Prisoner of Zenda" will.

DEFENDERS #s 53 & 54 have 12-page lead stories, and back-ups featuring Clea (by Naomi Basner, Sandy Plunkett & Tony Salmon) and Dr Strange (by Tom Sutton).

The "Jabberwocky" project has been shelved -- the feeling is that Marvel can create enough turkeys of their own (?).

Future MARVEL TEAM-UPs will feature Tigra, Man-Thing, Dr Strange, Satana, Thor, Captain Marvel, Black Panther, Blade, Daredevil, the Black Widow, and --hang on a minute, who's this "Uncle Tom Cobleigh" fella?

Warren are to publish a new magazine, with an SF emphasis. Out now is a STAR WARS filmbook.

STAR TREK is revived, for at least 22 new episodes starting next April.

After publishing 17 comics of material prepared last year, Charlton have again suspended publication of all their comics.

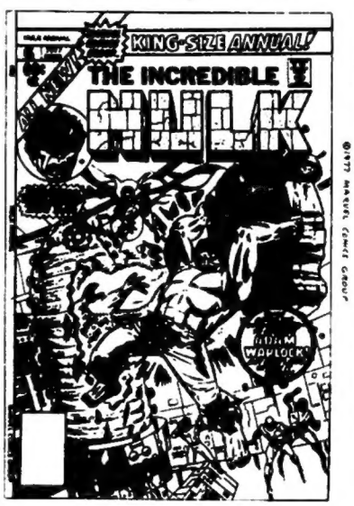
Marvel UK are soon to publish a SPIDER-MAN POSTER MAGAZINE at 35p, with his origin retold in strip form on the other side.

John Bolton has finished the second "Father Shandor" tale for HOUSE OF HAMMER; issue 14 has his "1,000,000 Years BC". Paul Neary is drawing "Revenge of Frankenstein".

KING COMICS are reviving--two of their titles are PHANTOM and BEETLE BAILEY.

Dick Giordano has left the CONTINUITY studio to work for DC. Neal Adams has done large posters of Batman, King Kong, Superman, Tarzan, Wonder Woman & Evel Kneivel, plus a poster for a stage version of "Sirens of Titan" by Kurt Vonnegut.

Thanks for much of the above news to Richard Morrissey and Colin Campbell -- issue 62 of FANTASY ADVERTISER is out now, at 45p by post from Colin at 'Biytoo', Plains Road, Great Totham, Maldon, Essex--issue 63 is due out in October.



Julius Schwartz will edit a new monthly "Superman Team-Up" title, to be written by Martin Pasko and drawn by J. L. Garcia Lopez. The SUPERMAN VS WONDER WOMAN book is due in October.

BATMAN FAMILY becomes a Dollar Comic with #17; it'll alternate with the bimonthly series of "Spectaculars", once known as annuals. BF #17 has a Batman & Robin story by O'Neil & Amendola (Batman will appear regularly in BF now, just as Superman does in Superman Family), a Batwoman, Batgirl & Huntress (who debuts in DC SUPER-STARS #17) story written by Rozakis, and a Demon & Man-Bat team-up, again by Bob Rozakis. After this, a Huntress series will appear in BF--after all, she is a member of Earth-2's Batman Family. The Demon may also get his own BF series.

WEIRD WAR #60 is an Englehart & Estrada 17-pager concerning the Hindenburg; #61 will be an SF issue, with stories by Roger McKenzie & Howie Chaykin, and Robert Kanigher & Alex Nino.

The WONDER WOMAN SPECTACULAR will contain a 64-page adventure written by Jack C. Harris. The BRAVE & BOLD SPECIAL features Batman, Sgt Rock (though they don't meet), & Deadman, plus a surprise guest. THE JLA SPECTACULAR will be scripted by Marty Pasko; he isn't able to take over their monthly title after the inventory of Steve Englehart scripts finishes; Gerry Conway takes over with #151, and will script the JLA oversize edition too. Gerry keeps the scripting of SUPERMAN VS SHAZAM (which Rich Buckler will draw), while Marty takes over the SUPERMAN LIFE STORY assignment.

Al Milgrom is to edit, and may draw, FIRESTORM, a Gerry Conway created superhero book.

TV writing may cut down Denny O'Neil's scripting; Neal Adams is scripting the later pages of the SUPERMAN VS MUHAMMAD ALI project over O'Neil's plot. He was scheduled to take over MR MIRACLE and DETECTIVE when the Englehart scripts run out.

The Wonder Woman TV show is being up-dated to 1977--back to Earth-1 for the comic...?

Don Heck will be the regular penciller on Superboy in ADVENTURE from #456 on. Al Weiss has pencilled SHAZAM #34. With Jim Aparo taking over the new Batman strip in BATMAN FAMILY, AQUAMAN will be drawn by Don Newton.

A Christmas special from DC, written by Tom DeFalco from an idea by Sheldon Mayer, features a club of youngsters pretending to be the JLA who acquire the actual powers of their heroes.

SUPERBOY & THE LSH #234 has the Legion versus the Composite Legionnaire; Joe Staton will be joining Sherman and Nasser as LSH regular artists.

Chris Ash PRESENTS: CAPTAIN FROG RO

LAST ISSUE WE LEFT OUR HERO TRAPPED IN A DARKENED AUDITORIUM WITH ONLY A CASUISTIC COMICS CONNOISSEUR AND JULIET JONES FOR COMPANY. NOW CAPTAIN FROG HAS ONLY ONE THOUGHT ON HIS MIND...

ZUT ALORS! WHEN IS ZE ICE-CREAM LADY GOING TO COME ROUND? ZERE IS ONLY ONE ANSWER! I MUST DO AS I ALWAYS DO IN TIMES OF STRESS!

I WEEL (HEH HEH) RUB MY MAGIC TALISMAN!

FOR THE BENEFIT OF OUR MORE SENSITIVE READERS (AND DESPITE PROTESTS FROM A MS. K GLANCY) WE HAVE DECIDED TO OMIT THIS SCENE FROM OUR TORRID TALE.

-CONSIDERATE CHRIS

SEVERAL RUBS LATER A SUDDEN FLASH FILLS THE THEATRE!

SACRÉ BLEU! EET EEZ LA BELLE FEMME WHO BESTOWED MY POWERS UPON ME!

OUI MON BRAVE! I 'AVE COME ENCORE! A NOBLE ANCESTOR OF YOURS IS IN DIRE PERIL! ONLY YOU CAN SAVE HIM!

BACK, BACK OUR HERO HURTLES TO A TIME BEFORE FRANCE WAS THE NUMBER ONE NATION ON EARTH! BACK, BACK TO THE DAYS OF... ASTEROID THE GALLING!

YOU WOULD BE WOBBLING ABOUT TOO IF YOU WERE STANDING ON WHAT I'M STANDING ON!

à suivre

RICH MORRISSEY'S AMERICA

What is fandom really for?

It means different things to different people. Some people have little use for fandom beyond collecting old comic books, or making money by dealing in old comic books. Both are legitimate objectives, certainly shared by many Bem readers--but most people who read fanzines are interested in more than that. They, like I, like to read about comics, to learn about titles with which they may not be familiar, to hear the opinions of other fans, and often to share their own opinions with others. In short, they want to communicate with other fans -- they can do so not only through fanzines, but in letters and in person at conventions.

Unfortunately, there are difficulties attached to all of these. A fanzine can be an expensive undertaking for its publisher, and can rarely print all articles, art and letters submitted--and there are often unexpected publishing delays. It's very difficult to write a great many long letters to very many other people on a regular basis over a long period of time. And conventions can be very difficult to attend -- often prohibitively so, if one lives far away from popular convention cities like New York and San Diego in the USA, or London in the United Kingdom.

As a result, communication-minded fans in the United States have formed what are known as amateur press associations, or apas. An apa has the economy of a letter but the scope of a fanzine--because, quite simply, it's up to each member to decide what he or she wants to do! Each member is responsible for producing his own apa fanzine, or "apazine", but an apazine can be as ambitious as its publisher wishes, and usually is printed very cheaply, on a ditto or mimeograph machine (which enough fans own to make printing available at reasonable rates). The apazines are all sent to one member, usually called the Central Mailer (CM), or sometimes official editor (OE). The CM gathers the apazines into bundles, each bundle (or "mailing") containing one copy of each zine -- they are sometimes stapled together into one or two big zines, but that depends on the apa. Each member then receives a copy of the mailing from the CM, in return for printing enough copies of his own apazine to be included in the mailing, and for a small sum paid to the CM to finance his sending out all the mailings.

A typical apazine runs from four to twelve pages (though it can be longer, and quite often is), and contains whatever the member wishes -- articles, fiction, illustrations if the member can draw, and "mailing comments" on past apa mailings are all frequently included. Some of the more ambitious apazines contain material by other people, and occasionally they become as carefully produced as general fanzines (indeed, apa members who also produce general fanzines sometimes send them through), but a member's regular contribution is usually much less formal.

The idea of an apa actually predates fandom; the National Amateur Press Alliance (NAPA) was founded in 1876 and still exists today. It has room for about 300 members (that is, 300 copies of every apazine must be made), but most of them do little more than pay their dues and receive the mailings, to which only a small percentage of the membership does actually contribute.

In 1937, science fiction fan Donald A. Wollheim founded FAPA, the Fantasy Amateur Press Association. He required that every member contribute a certain minimum activity (or "minac") to a certain percentage of mailings -- in this case eight pages every four quarterly mailings -- and most apas in fandom have followed suit.

The first apa in comic fandom was CAPA-alpha (the first Comics APA -- a pun, I believe, on the name of a fraternity), which was founded by Jerry Bails in 1964. The early members were Jerry's friends in fandom, including Roy Thomas, Don & Maggie Thompson, BATMANIA founder Biljo White, and Mike Barrier, whose zine for this apa (abbreviated K-a), FUNNYWORLD, eventually became a slick general-circulation zine. A number of current professionals, such as Marty Pasko, Dwight Decker, and now Mark Evanier, have held membership; there was originally room for 50 members, but this was dropped to 40 a few years ago when there weren't that many new people interested in joining--and now there are currently 20 people waiting to join! But those who are willing to struggle up the Waitlist, as I did a couple of years ago, will find it a very rewarding experience. Its present CM is Samuel Schraeger.

But those who find it tiresome to wait might be interested in NYAPA (New York Amateur Press Association, though now its membership is spread all over the country and, in one case, the world), which was founded in 1971 by a K-a waitlister, Neal Pozner (who prepared the Legion Handbook for Amazing World of DC Comics #9). Like Jerry Bails, Neal no longer belongs to the apa he founded (though he remains in K-a), but several of the newcomers to the comics field, like Tony Isabella, Paul Levitz, and Paul Kupperberg, have belonged to NYAPA, and Carl Gafford and Guy Lillian III still do. Its current CM is Charles Spanier.

25 copies of all zines are required.

Is anyone out there interested in the Legion of Super-Heroes? If so, you might be interested in INTERLAC, an apa named after the language of the 30th century, which Harry Broertjes, Mike Flynn and I put together last year. The membership limit is 50, and it's far from filled (though growing fast!) and the present CM is Kenneth Gale.

Paul Levitz has just joined this apa himself, as has new DC writer Liz Smith, and Ken thinks he can get the Legion's new editor, Al Milgrom, to join. Dave Cockrum and Jim Shooter both belonged until they failed to make minac -- they may rejoin.

Although these are all American apas, any interested British fan would certainly be welcome, and might even be able to get his mailing first class. K-a has a member in Belgium, NYAPA has one in Malaysia, and England's own Richard Burton hopes to join INTERLAC. If this article has whetted your appetite, by all means contact the CM of any apa you're interested in--he'll be glad to give you more information.

Or, if you have some interest outside comics -- be it children's fantasy, rock music, Star Trek, or just about anything for which a fandom exists -- chances are there's an apa just for you. Andrew Sigel.

has put together an index of all the apas he knows about, called SOUTH OF THE MOON--a copy costs 50c in the United States, a suitable equivalent should get you a copy.

SOTM lists two British apas--OMPA (Off-trails Magazine Publishers' Association) and ROMPA (Rival Off-trails Magazine Press Association), whose CMs are Keith Walker,

and Ian Maule,

respectively--but there are none connected with comic fandom. I understand that Martin tried to found such an apa at one time, but unsuccessfully.

It's a pity -- as a member of several apas, I know how much fun they can be--and, above all, how reliable they are, as with each member responsible only for his own zine, the CM has no excuse for not sending it out on time, and almost always does put each mailing out punctually on a monthly or bimonthly basis. Yes, England definitely could use some apas of its own --but, until that happens, it's time that British fandom learned more about this excellent institution of American fandom.

COMIC MART
LIVERPOOL
BLUECOAT CHAMBERS CONCERT HALL

8TH OCTOBER 1977

Dealers **9** a.m. - Collectors at Noon - Adm. 10p
(Dealers Free)

Dealers Tables £3.00 each in advance
Bookings must Include an S.A.E. for Conformation

Usual FREE refreshments available

3.30 pm - Original '30s SUPERMAN Radio Broadcast

4 pm - '40s BATMAN / CAP. MARVEL TV Serials Film Show

SATURDAY

Bookings/enquiries (S.A.E.) to:

Zephyr

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KATHOLICITY

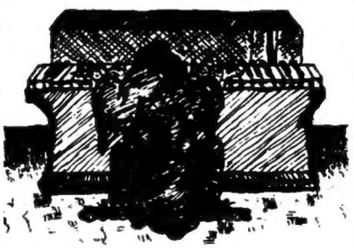
Only in "Reaction" could a person be simultaneously accused of being obsessed with sex and believing in stories about little clay statues. Actually, I do not now and never have believed in clay statues. Rich Morrissey's recollection is not at fault, but the letter he mentioned had been somewhat edited and an "if you believe that unlikely story in the first place" was one of the things that went. And, as for you, Mister Ash! Don't you know that anyone who spent a lot of time indulging in sex wouldn't have the time (or strength probably) to write about it. I lead a quite virtuous life most of the time, greatly helped by the extreme scarcity of the kind of man I fancy. Would you believe that there's not a single blue-suited, red-cloaked and yellow-S-chested hero to be found in Edinburgh? Nor any unerring archers (beard optional), masked men of mystery, or mutants. As a matter of fact I have a soft spot for a certain mutant with an ever-shadowed face, cloven-hooved feet, a tail, and an endearing personality --and, believe me, you don't find his like in Princes Street Gardens.

Said Lord Greystoke "It gives me a pain
When young people, again and again
Disregard E.R.B.
And associate me
With this bloody "Me Tarzan, you Jane"

"If I ever", he said "chance to meet
The film writers, with brains incomplete
Who portrayed me as thick
As two short bits of stick
It's 'Bundolo' for them, au plus vite"

Why, MDV, does it surprise you that Tarzan speaks better English than many of his fellows in the House of Lords? We are, after all, dealing with the Edgar Rice Burroughs Tarzan, who was so intelligent that he taught himself to read and write with nothing but a few children's books to guide him. Burroughs' Tarzan, who as well as perfect English spoke Swahili, several other African dialects, French, a smattering of Dutch, some German, some Latin and, of course, Ape. The monosyllabic moron of the movies had very little to do with Burroughs' Tarzan. ERB himself was apparently unable to watch any of the films because of the effect they had on his stomach. The only thing that we are directly told about Tarzan's speech is that he doesn't have an Oxford accent. What accent he does have we aren't told; it may be American, from constant association with the former Jane Porter of Baltimore, or it may very possibly be faintly French, since French was the first human language he learned -- Paul D'Arnot, with a sad lack of knowledge of the proper order of things, chose to teach his newfound but inarticulate friend his own native language instead of the one that every Englishman knows is spoken by God. In any event, whatever the accent, Tarzan's grammar and vocabulary are as good as the next man's in all but the first part of the first book. In keeping him articulate Marvel are being neither convenience-seizing or, in my view, irritating. They are being accurate, just as they should be when doing an adaptation.

I trust that they will be as true to the character of Jane, who has suffered too often in the past from being thrust into damsel-in-distress rôles (not to mention that her film incarnation didn't do her justice either) when she was, in fact, in the neat phrase of Michael Mauser, a tough little broad. True, she started off as a pretty helpless creature, but marriage is made of compromise, and somewhere in the progress of Jane's marriage, while her husband was learning not to eat caterpillars in polite society, to refrain from killing his foes out of hand, not on any account to give out with the victory cry of the bull-ape when he won a game of draughts, and so on, Jane learned something about survival in the jungle. When, for instance, a plane she is travelling on crashes in unmapped Africa she is the one who takes charge of the party, tells them all what to do to survive, and climbs around the treetops with some agility and verve. She leads them rather well, and it is hardly her fault that the party includes the obligatory murderer, or that they have landed on the outskirts of yet another Lost City, or that they all come to grief and Tarzan has to come and save them. Similarly when kidnapped by nasty Germans during World War I and hauled off to the lost land of Pal-ul-don Jane manages, on escaping her captors, to live quite comfortably in the jungle, building a tree-house and hunting for her food. On encountering a German officer who, being less adaptable than she, is starving to death, she responds to his plea for help with a most refreshing lack of that mythic quality, womanly compassion. Their countries are at war, she tells him; moreover he has burned her home, killed her friends, subjected her husband to mental torture (by planting false evidence to make him think Jane was dead too) and kidnapped her, and for anything she cares he can starve to death, if he isn't eaten first. She later nearly spears Tarzan himself, hearing a noise outside and taking the new arrival for the German. Luckily, he has the good sense to speak to her before coming in for the big reunion scene. (He has been whiling away the time of their separation by throwing stray Germans to starving lions and similar. He was rather narked at his wife's 'death'...) There is certainly no evidence so far that Marvel intend to bring out these aspects of Jane's character, but it's much too soon to tell after only 3 issues. If they only remember that while she was partly civilising Tarzan he was partly primitivising her, she could be one of the most interesting women in comics.



While welcoming the idea of a World Of Krypton series (was I the only person that liked the Krypton stories that used to back up Superman?), I have this horrible idea that they're going to have Jor-El--you know Jor-El, the young, black-haired scientist who's the father of the future Superman, been around for years in flashbacks and time travel stories--I'm afraid they're going to have him looking like Marlon Brando does in the film. And from recent press releases we know what that is like, don't we? The costume is right enough, even the face isn't too bad--but since he was wearing a wig anyway (wasn't he? His hair isn't really like that, is it?), why not make it a black wig? And why make Lara a blonde? This kind of thing is extremely irritating. Moreover they can't win now, however they portray the leading characters in the comic. What is gained by film fans who wouldn't recognise the Jor-El we know, but will buy a comic with Brando on the cover, will be lost on longterm comics fans picking the thing up, and screaming "Jor-El and Lara don't look like that", muttering rapidly about rip-offs, commercialisation and cashing in, and throwing it down again. Or vice versa.

Let's see, recently Steve Englehart has treated us to Construct, the return of the Red Tornado, that peculiar JLA 'origin' story, Willow, and now a new villain called "the Star Tsar". "The Star Tsar"??? Why is it that I get the impression that Steve Englehart doesn't always take his scripting of the Justice League of America 100% seriously?

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

REACTION

Dear Martin,

I've taken personal delight in the overseas mail received lately, in that fandom in other English speaking countries does appear to have reached a high calibre. More fanzines than usual, and each of good quality both in content and printing. After examining BEMUSING, two salient thoughts came to mind immediately. The first is that our two major comic book publishers, Marvel and DC, have certainly expanded their market in Great Britain; the second is that fans in the Commonwealth seem to be giving their own legacies short shrift.

As mentor to "Duffy" Vohland, Marvel's English magazines editor for some time, I've witnessed an expansion of activity at that publisher's headquarters in New York City. Over at DC, Paul Levitz, one of their major editors, mentioned to me at a Sunday breakfast last April, when we were guests of honour at the Pittsburgh Comix Convention, that his company is "holding the line". They are taking a careful look at the market in England before bringing out special material, such as another Captain Britain. Therefore you can look forward to what we in this country have come to feel is mediocrity at high prices. Such a comment coincides with Reg Uspatoff's column.

I've found that comic material from the UK is a refreshing change from our ultra-dynamic, repetitious fare. BULLET, LOOK & LEARN, ACTION etc in particular have much that is well worth attention. In fact, I am working on a multi-part series covering THE TRIGAN EMPIRE, which I consider one of the most magnificent pieces of material to appear since the early 1950's; it is so impressive illustratively that fans in the USA are entitled to, and shall, know about it. Bellamy's Garth is another. So you see, Martin, you people have a lot of good things of your own, and I'd like to see it exploited in your fan press more.

-Howard P. Siegel.

Point taken, Howard; thank you for your comments. Given time, Ruan will cover most of Britain's comics output, and also some of the best panelological productions from the rest of Europe; and "Comix Comments" and the review section will continue to cover both home-produced and imported publications, I'm sure. Nevertheless, the emphasis in Bem is likely to remain on American comics, because more of us are more interested in them.

Dear Martin,

Thanks for Bem-14. I'd written a letter to Bem-13 the night before, and was about to send it; it's not that I was late, you understand--Bem was early!

I liked the return of the Highgate Six, you should make it a regular feature. The point about reading comics in public was quite true. Most people on a bus would never have read a comic (recently anyway) --but they've had their attitude to comics banged into their heads by retired army colonels and school-mistresses in barbed wire skirts. To see someone intelligent-looking (me!) reading a comic probably wouldn't make a scrap of difference to what they think; maybe if everyone on the bus but one was reading a comic, it might make that one person think again -- or is that too much to hope?

-Jerry Rees.

It would be more likely to make him get off at the next stop, Jerry! The general reaction to The Highgate Six's second meeting (their first get-together was in Bem-8) has been good; I hadn't envisaged any further discussions, but if readers want 'em, they'll get 'em. Would anyone care to suggest some suitable topics?

Dear Martin,

I must say that I agree with Chris Ash's letter, saying that a certain Mr Billing deserves some original artwork from Carmine Infantino or somebody; please forward all donations to the address below. And I also agree with his little comment on Kathy Glancy. Do you realise that if the Comics Code Authority ever find out about her, you'll very probably have to go underground?

Now that 2001 is dead, or more accurately degenerated into the less promising MR MACHINE, and ETERNALS offers us the scintillating subtleties of "Ikaris vs the Cosmic-Powered Hulk", I feel that I'm once again witnessing the murder of two innovative attempts to lift comics out of the basic battling hero plot, and this makes me very angry and bitter. And this feeling grows after reading about the way that editorial policy at Marvel, rather than bad sales, killed Don McGregor's books, in (dare we mention it?) CMN. I can't believe that Stan Lee would let this sort of thing go on. Anyway, both Don and Steve Englehart are going into books, now, and although they will lose something in the way of illustration (as a great artist like Craig Russell, Gene Colan or Frank Brunner can add as much to a story as the writer can) at least they won't suffer the commercial restrictions of the editors and buyers, and the space restrictions of a 17-page comic. Yet I still feel that, in the right hands, well illustrated stories could become a major new art form, if only they weren't branded as 'comics'. Perhaps the answer lies with Stan's successful reprint books, and the all-new Surfer book--with these the sales need not be so high, and the selling period is not restricted to one month, while the readership tends to be more interested and mature (due to the price), so the potential is far greater. After all, if Stan can sell a few reprints padded out with his egoistic "memories", then how will new and complete material go? If it's successful, can you imagine an Eternals book (whew), or a Dr Strange book, or even a Howard book?

-Stephen Billing.

I'm having enough trouble getting used to 35 cent comics--and you want ones with a ten dollar price tag? It's a nice idea, though; let's see what happens.

THOR IS ©1977 MARVEL COMICS GROUP

Dear Martin,

One thing that really annoys me is the way the few decent comics Marvel produce are the ones that always seem to be getting cancelled. KA-ZAR, WARLOCK, and THE SILVER SURFER were three fine comics in my mind, yet not one of these magazines survived beyond a twentieth issue. Unbelievably, KA-ZAR was cancelled while in the hands of Mayerik and Moench, who are probably the greatest team about, equalled only by Moench and Gulacy! The Surfer was stopped with the Lee/Buscema team doing the creative work, and WARLOCK was cancelled with Jim Starlin! It's almost unbelievable that comics like these should fade away into oblivion while titles like BLACK PANTHER, ETERNALS, and other Kirby books flourish.

I can't seem to understand why many of the younger fans, and some older ones too, seem to prefer things like these to the masterpieces which people such as Gerber, Moench, Gulacy, Mayerik, Brunner et cetera produce. I wonder whether the imminent slump in comics will sort this out, or kill comics -- only time will tell.

-Brian Bonhomme.

Well, BLACK PANTHER hasn't got up to 20 issues yet; with the current spate of Kirby kancellations, it's not likely to. ETERNALS has been under-valued by many of us, as has 2001 -- but now they're just further proof that the innovating titles do seem to die young. I can't see comics ever dying out completely--let's just hope that in the coming months some of the bad titles bite the dust, just for a change.

Dear Bemusing,

Up city alleys and down motorway slip-roads terminal punk cases carrying garbled messages have reached me and are relating whispered words that Andrew Johnson in Ongar is asking where I am.

I am still with you... hermit like at my desk scratching out drawings for mags and zines like the fabled Galaxy Z.

But sometimes the media finks fold up the mags and quit the city in a cloud of creditors and trampled artwork. Even Ally Sloper... the aged punk citizen... owes me a two page strip but the decrepit bum is so old + deaf that he ignores requests for it to be returned.

The famous hip gonzo detective Spindle Hoylake asked me to illustrate some of his adventures in the Rainy City where he operates from an office staffed by his cerebral secretary and ex groupie BB Dollars. People have shown passing interest and alarm at his exploits concerning the demise of comics baron Abel T. Rippemoff and not a few knee caps have been blown off after his near escape in the "Gossip severs your jugular" affair.

Enclosed is a drawing of Moorcock's 'Elric of Melniboné' dedicated to all... who like Mr Johnson... ask where I am.

Perhaps others will ask where we all are.

-Martin Dutton.

It's a shame Ally Sloper folded, since it did showcase some interesting material--but it did try to sit on too many fences, in an attempt to appeal to too many types of reader. If Denis Gifford is holding on to submissions still (and Chris Ash has mentioned a strip of his hasn't yet been returned), that could mean that he's got some new publishing plans to astonish us with. And thanks for the art, Martin; is there any chance of some more?

Dear Martin,

The Highgate Six, huh! If you and your grave-robbers carry on knocking Kirby like that I'll demand you transfer my sub to the Panelologist, or even CMN.

Ray Hopkins sounds like he was wound up; even I agree with his comments on Kirby. Harnessing would mean he'd have to work to a story, as in the Kirby/Lee days.

-The Sick Subscriber.

(Well, why not? If you can dress up in a cape & amulet and call yourself Emlock, Ms Glancy can don a leotard and call herself the Black Widow, and N. Edwards can put on a duck suit and call himself Howard, why can't I wrap in bandages and call myself The Sick Subscriber?)

Just as long as you were sick <u>before</u> Bem arrived, Lee! But how, pray, can I send you a free copy of Bem for a published letter if I don't know who you are, Mr McLoughlin? Didn't think of that, did you!

Dear Martin,

Thanks for Bem-14, already the new size is a big success with most people. I don't like the cover repros on the front cover; they're all right in the news column, but not on the front page. Why not have some larger illustrations on the cover, you've got a good bunch of artists to call on.

Bem has too many comic reviews and not enough fanzine reviews; Ed Sallis should have an extra page, taken from the Review Section. Also, I like 'Made in Britain', it's good to know what's happening in our own country; and I'm glad to see "Comix Comments" back, you should keep it in every issue.

Thundermole is the best strip you've got; I didn't think much of Herman, the One-Legged Crow.

K. Williams complains when Kathleen Glancy gets her own column -- and now he gets one too, which isn't very good at all! Bem-14 had one or two bad things in, but it still stays at the top of my list.

-Joe Matthews.

You're right about the front cover, Joe; I intend to devote more space to original art, and less to cover repros, over the next few issues, so keep watching...

Dear Martin,

I read comics on the bus, on the train, in a car, in the pu-- Well, I suppose it isn't so bad for somebody my age to pull out the latest DEFENDERS and read it in public, although I do look much older than I should. (Did you hear that, Ms Glancy?)

At school, if my teachers play their cards right (that is, no more homework for Rog) I'll let them have a little peek in their break time. It amazes me to see most of my teachers talking of the old days when they were collectors themselves.

Martin, do you give all your artists complementary Bems? That means, with 16 artists in Bem-14, £3.20 worth of Bems given out free -- that means I'll start sending you more drawings.

How about art on the cover? Some of the cover repros did not come out very well. Katholicity was great stuff. I tried to find the word in my dictionary, but the nearest I could find was 'Katipo', which means "a small black venomous spider"--and she tells us she doesn't really dress like the Black Widow!

-Roger McBroom.

Well, that's her story -- and who are we to doubt a lady? I do indeed give free Bems to all contributors -- one more reason I'll never be rich!

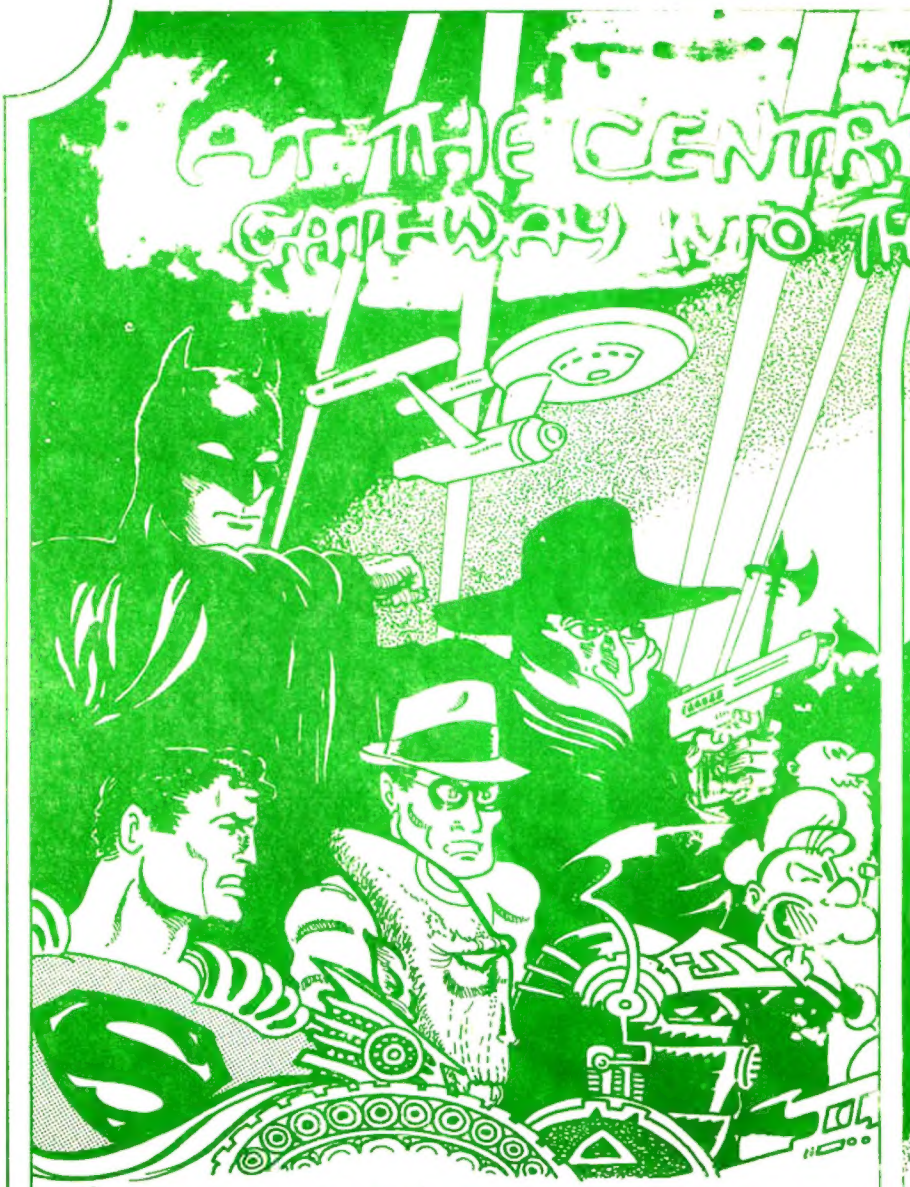
Dear Martin,

I agree with Andy Johnson that reading Marvel and DC is not the only way of being entertained; if you've got bored with their trashy comics, just look elsewhere, 'tis easy. When Cap Marvel lost Jim Starlin, or something similar, I discovered lots of more interesting forms of reading. To begin with, I took more notice of the Marvel black and whites, which, although the stories were only usually "one-shot", were a lot better than the run-of-the-mill superhero yarn (or, maybe--yawn); I also took more notice of British (hurrah!) comics, and recently I've found Star * Reach and similar books are really good. I even get 2000 AD every week; and then there is House of Hammer, which is very good--and <u>fanzines</u> satisfy my "hunger" for fantasy stuff, too.

Take my advice--if American comics don't please you any more, either write and complain, or look for an alternative.

-John Matthews, Rochdale

Or create and draw your own strips, eh?



THE GATEWAY IS THE FRONT DOOR OF OUR SHOP ~ AND ONCE THE WEARY TRAVELLER PASSES THROUGH THESE MYSTIC PORTALS HE WILL BE CONFRONTED BY VARIED FARE IN PRODIGIOUS QUANTITIES SUCH AS IMPORTED MARVEL, NATIONAL, GOLD KEY & WARREN MAGAZINES ~ NEWSPAPER COMIC SECTIONS ~ NATIONAL LAMPOON & THE LIKE ~ U.S. PAPERBACKS OF VARIED CONTENT ~ BOOKS ABOUT COMICS AND STRIP COLLECTIONS ~ WHILST DROOLING AT THE MOUTH HIS AMAZED GAZE WILL THEN FALL UPON HUGE PILES OF GOLDEN

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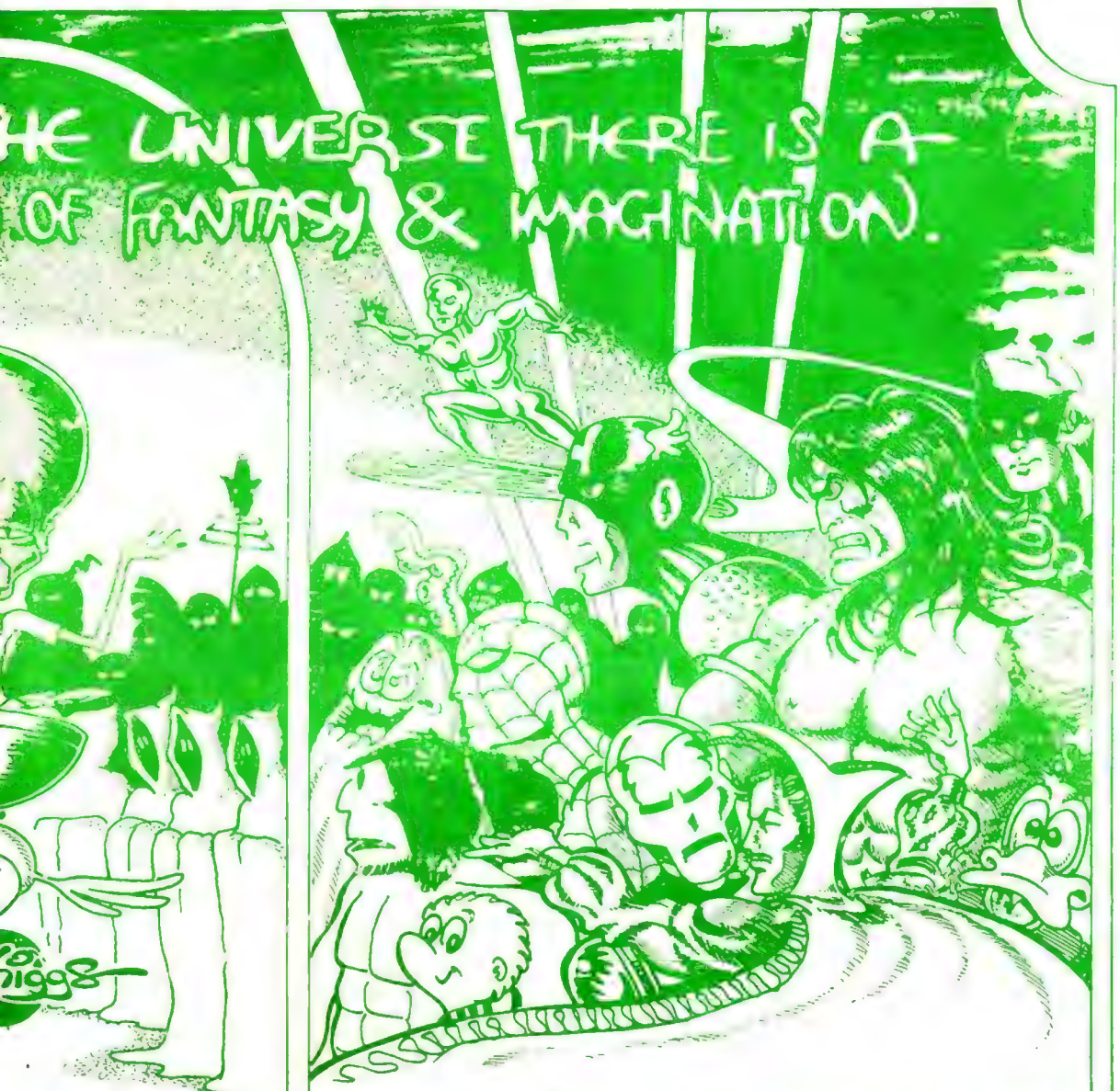

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AGE COMICS ~ VINTAGE BRITISH WEEKLIES ~ UNDERGROUND COMIX ~ CONTINENTAL COMIC ALBUMS ~ FANZINES ~ RECORDS ~ BADGES ~ POSTERS ~ POSTCARDS (B.R.M.B NOSTALGIA PACKS) ~ JIGSAWS & VARIOUS ODDITIES IN THE COMIC STRIP SPIN-OFF FIELD. COLLECTIONS OF VINTAGE COMICS WILL BE PURCHASED AT FAIR PRICES AND OTHER COLLECTABLE ITEMS ARE REGULARLY BEING SOUGHT. SO DEAR READER, HEAD FOR BIRMINGHAM (THE ~ TRUE CENTRE OF THE UNIVERSE) AND VISIT THE ~ LARGEST COMIC COMPLEX IN BRITAIN OUTSIDE LONDON.

Dear Martin,

I liked "The Highgate Six Return"; you all sound such a friendly group. Is Nige Edwards naturally witty, or does it take practise?

The discussion mentioned the interesting point of reading comics on buses & trains. Personally, I don't have the courage to read comics in public, but I remember seeing a man, probably about thirty, open up his executive briefcase on the bus and get out a copy of KULL AND THE BARBARIANS #3; I was surprised to see an adult reading a Marvel mag on a bus, but I suppose there is a difference between a magazine and a comic. It seems that comics still have a long way to go before the public fully understands them. But does it matter? Here we are in 1977, and people still don't understand science fiction as well as they ought to. Oh, well...

I've been looking over past issues of Bemusing, and I laughed again at "Bullpun Bulletins" in Bem-3. Is there a chance of seeing any more Bullpun Bulletins? There seems to be plenty to send up.

-David Fielder.

There's always a chance, David--in fact, we may well be ruining our chances with DC too in a near-future Bem...

Dear Martin,

Ta very much for Bem 14, another very enjoyable issue of, in my opinion, the country's greatest newszine.

These days I seem to be getting totally disheartened with Marvel and DC, despite the so-called 'new surprises' that they keep unleashing. Personally, I think the future of comics as a whole lies with people like Mike Friedrich (Star*Reach) and those 'big name' writers and artists who go their separate ways with projects that come out as true collector's items.

I find myself, recently, to be much more willing to fork out pounds here and there for one-shot publications such as Heroes Inc by Wally Wood, rather than for a back issue of a well-established comic title. The constant repetitive bull that comes from the 'big two' is rather a waste of time and money--their time, my money.

After for years being conditioned into buying Marvel and DC material, I have discovered what I have been missing. How great it is to discover the likes of Big Apple Comix, Star*Reach, Mediascene and numerous others, all with their own sense of purpose and individuality; unlike DC and Marvel comics, which, now, with a few exceptions, are bland and tasteless.

One of the most interesting characters to come from DC in many years was Robert Kanigher's RAGMAN, which was, while it lasted, a truly compelling, atmospheric book. After so many years of grandiose heroes calling themselves fighters for the oppressed, along comes Ragman, who is -- in the mere five issues of the title you could really feel the poverty of the people who came into the Junk Shop. Few comic titles have struck me like this one. Kudos to Kanigher, Kubert and the Redondo Studio for some very fine work indeed.

Lanihorne's 'Made In Britain' was a definite improvement this issue, and I was glad to see the return of the Highgate Six and 'Comix Comments'.

-Jan Garczynski.

Old Bem features never die, it seems; they strike back when you least expect them!

Dear Martin,

I've never written a LoC before, but I thought I'd just drop you a line or 20 to say how much I enjoy Bem. I'd like to see more stuff on the lines of the Deathlok article, tracing the career of a certain character or magazine--any hope of one on the Shadow?

I'd also like to say I disagree with Mr Stangroom's review of STAR WARS 1. True, the Chaykin art was poor, but far from being difficult, the story is really quite straightforward. STAR WARS is pure 1940's space opera, a galactic epic with all of the good old clichés of its kind, with a beautiful princess, not one but two smart-ass robots, and some really nasty villains.

Finally a quick question. Is there any comics fan club near me? If not, anyone interested in forming one in the Newcastle and Sunderland area contact me.

-Neil Thompson.

I hope some local Bem readers join you to form a club, Neil. COMICS UNLIMITED #34 was a Shadow special, so we'll keep clear of him for a while; but more articles are definitely on the way, never fear.

Dear Martin,

In the "Highgate Six" conversation you and Nige Edwards highlighted the general public's attitude towards comics. Diana Richmond went on to suggest that perhaps if comics were read more openly, this would change the general consensus of opinion -- but somehow I doubt it.

Comics like Superman, Marvel Team-Up, and Spider-Man are in the majority, while titles like Deathlok, Green Lantern/Green Arrow, and Warlock are few and far between --the average comic has several obligatory fights (even in Team-Up, with the heroes usually fighting before they team up to defeat the villain), a costumed villain with seldom sufficient motivation, other than "the death of that accursed hero", frequent cliché situations such as Iron Man's malfunctioning chestplate, and cute and melodramatic dialogue.

Until the average age of comic readers increases, I cannot see any change in the present situation. The 8-year-olds who make up the majority of the readership do not want a sophisticated hero, they want action and fighting; what is a member of the public supposed to think when he tries an average comic? He doesn't know that a Howard the Duck or Tomb of Dracula is just a few inches away.

-D. S. Elliott.

There have to be different types of comics for different sorts of reader--but it does seem there are too many low-level books put out by the main companies these days.

Dear Martin,

Reg Uspatoff suggests that the comic companies shouldn't indulge the creators and their whims when they create a comic. Right on! They should carefully construct a character, going by specially commissioned reports by students. Take a little bit of Spidey...mix in Superman, and you have got a hit. Soulless, but a hit. What the hell use is a soulless hit?

Comics should be created because the writer gets an idea he likes, and can develop...an artist comes in, and helps along the story. That's what makes a good comic--not an illustrated research sheet. Did Uspatoff ever consider the fact that some stories are not meant to be stretched over thirty years? Everyone accepts that novels, plays, films, now even TV only have to keep a situation going as long as ...let me start again. What Reg Uspatoff suggests is a terrible situation whereby McGregor's canning is justified. I can't see any difference between getting snotty about the reasons for publishing a "loser" and justifying McGregor being sacked because he produced stuff which didn't sell. If you get a popular comic which lasts over thirty years you get the uninspiring dullness of Superman. I'm not saying that everything interesting about the Man of Steel has been written, but in my opinion we're still awaiting a sequel to Denny O'Neil's brilliant, fantastic novel which I think of as "Superman versus the Sand Man"... all the rest are just fill-in stories. Each comic has certain highspots which are Nobel Prize-worthy, and fill-in spots which are comparable to the holiday the writer has with the money from the prize... which brings me to his second point. He seems to be against reincarnation, and cites HULK, destroying his own case. The first Hulk stories, although not lacking in a weird and wonderful atmosphere, had no real merit... Stan Lee didn't know what to do with the creature and seemed to change the format every issue... he'd got a good idea, but he didn't know what to do with it. Later he brought it back, because he did know what to do with it. Obviously there are reincarnations because the people who were once fans figure they know what to do with the character. Is there anything wrong with humouring the creator? Perfectly reputable publishers do this all the time when they publish books with no intention of turning them into series. SHADE may not be a superhero sensation -- on the other hand it may bring pleasure to people who are that way inclined. Who really wants a new SPIDEY or WONDER WOMAN? What fans seem to want is more POWER MAN, BLACK PANTHER or KILLRAVEN.

I liked "The Highgate Six"--kinda like MASH revisited. Or should that be CASH... Comics And Silliness in Highgate? Oh gee, wonder of wonders, Andy Johnson puts down a list of great artists, and actually puts himself last...wow. And if he thinks that dull lifeless stuff gets praised because it's in American comics, he obviously has not seen the criticisms of Heck, Estrada, Abel and Kirby.

-Graeme Bassett.

I see your point about "non-commercial" comics -- but I also can understand what Reg Uspatoff was worried about. To survive DC and Marvel must make profits--and only successes make money, sad to say.

Dear Martin,

The Highgate Six needs more room, and less interruptions; I know you try to instil a relaxed atmosphere, but Jonn Hay interrupts too much, and the result is that not much actual discussion gets done --what <u>does</u> get done is rather long-winded. I suggest that you release, perhaps, a separate special issue called THE HIGHGATE SIX, perhaps covering two or three hours. That way you could get a <u>real</u> discussion, something that cannot possibly be fitted into the one A4 page that you gave it.

I spotted, in Reaction, Howard Stangroom praising the artist of "Judge Dredd" in 2000 AD. In CMN 31, Colin Crane said that Dredd was the worst series in the book-- I disagree totally! Dredd has by far the best art in the whole book. I've noticed of late that Belardinelli's art has gone down in standard dismally recently. The "Harlem Heroes" strip has never fascinated me much, and I dislike Gibbons' art style (although I know he has a lot of talent). "Invasion: 1999" is still OK, but it has become stereotyped of late, with every issue having Bill Savage (what a name) attacking the Volgans in a different way every ish. "Flesh" is still OK, but is being ended soon anyway, and that leaves "M.A.C.H. 1"--CRAP! Such a rip-off I have never seen before, and people lap it up! "Judge Dredd" is truly Marvellous; the art is fresh, and the angles from which the views are taken are extremely creative for a British IPC book. Well done!

-Matthew Vaughan.

I tend to agree about 2000 AD, except that I <u>do</u> like Dave Gibbons' art style; what "Invasion" needs is a continuing storyline from week to week. And what's it worth not to tell Jonn Hay your full address?

Dear Martin,

I didn't always enjoy black and white magazines as I do now; in fact, it was barely six months ago that I first bought VAMPI (British Edition) ≠1. Nothing really clicked for me until I got MARVEL PREVIEW ≠4, with Starlord -- until then I'd never seen a b & w magazine, so I really mutated in joy over that issue, which still strikes me as an all-time great saga--I can't wait for Starlord's second coming soon.

My favourite mag now must be UNKNOWN WORLDS OF SCIENCE FICTION--what a title, man! SF as you like it. Just look at some of the artists--you get Chaykin, Corben, Colan, Giordano, Morrow, Nino, and more. I can't talk much about Warrens, as I've only got CREEPY ≠87, the Mars issue--grab any you can grovel for for under 50p. I can even remember when they were in the shops for less for a few brief months.

I've only just begun collecting undergrounds; I've got the Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers 1-4, when I bought them I didn't know what I was letting myself in for, but they were out of this world, really hysterical. So why don't you all try one, or a b & w mag -- otherwise, you will never know what fun you're missing.

-Christophe Ta-Min.

Which draws to a close another lengthy Bem lettercol, with the usual savage cutting. My apologies to the worst victims of the editorial hatchet, and to those I couldn't fit in at all--better luck next time! How about a few new topics for Bem-16? I think we've just about finished "colour comics are crummy" for the time being!

BACK AGAIN...DESPITE POPULAR DEMAND...

SIGH

by K. (the eternal optimist) Williams!

(2) WHITHER COMICS? (And Need They?)

I imagine by now it's general knowledge amongst those who are familiar with my writings (and I'm assured that there are some besides Nige) that I take perverse pleasure in holding unfashionable views. Like, for instance, preferring DC to Marvel at times when no-one in fandom with any social nous would admit to even looking at DC; or, for another instance, despising E-MAN as having no intrinsic merit (other than the art that is)--a view that I still hold, and will one day be lynched for.

It is surely therefore only fit & proper that at the time when practically everyone seems to be busy saying comics as we know them are a dead duck (or perhaps a dodo being kept going by a respirator would be a closer analogy), that I should leap to their defense, and proclaim my hope and belief that they will survive.

Well, mainly I don't have much faith in (or, come to that, all that much liking for) the alternatives so far proposed.

Undergrounds? Puerile & adolescent. No doubt that's what a lot of people expect of <u>comics</u> -- but what made <u>me</u> at any rate a comics fanatic was the way that, with various regrettable exceptions (which I don't think I need to list), they aimed <u>up</u> at their audience, not down.

Black and whites? Disasters. Not only financially, but (contrary to popular myth) in terms of quality too. They were obviously designed expressly for the blood & guts market; their stylistic writing and heavy imagery has rarely compensated for the paucity of original ideas. All their best efforts have been adaptations of other people's works (Maltese Falcon, The Planet of the Apes, various S & S stuff)--strictly nowhere. And anyway, I never <u>could</u> see black & white as being much of an improvement over colour...

Dollar size books? Too big. Whereas I'm all in favour in principle of more space for the stories, so that they can develop without being rushed, this is a whole other thing -- under this set-up you get non-optional extras. Because there's so <u>much</u> space in this size, there are several back-ups to the main feature, so that if you want the Supes-Bats team-up in WF (not likely perhaps, but bear with me) you have to buy with it stories of Green Arrow, Wonder Woman, Vigilante, etc--whether you want them or not. Now of course there may be advantages to this, inasmuch as this way you may get to see good strips that you would otherwise have missed, but my consumerist gut-feeling is of deprivation of choice. I'd like to be able to <u>choose</u> to buy, or not, the stories in question. Also of course the price is somewhat off-putting; a dollar may not be much these days, true, but it's still almost three times as much as 35c, a consideration not to be overlooked.

The 60c size looks a reasonable compromise; about 34 pages is enough room for the heroes to breathe (groups like JLA & the Legion do tend to seem a bit cramped in normal size mags), without the necessity of bringing in extraneous back-ups. In fact, it's around the right length for a single-issue story -- which is the problem, 'cause the single-ish complete-in-itself story is, if not exactly dead, at least confined to its sick-bed. These days, having a problem introduced, struggled with, and resolved all in the course of one issue seems far too pat; it just doesn't feel right any more. So, to bring back single-ish stories on a regular basis now would, I feel, be a bad mistake--and with the 60c size there is a distinct danger of that. One can only hope that, if it should become the standard size, such temptations would be resisted.

But why write off the 35c size, anyway? Okay, so it's down (generally) to 17 pages of material; it's not quantity that counts but quality, to coin a cliché. Back when there were 22-23 pages of story to a book there was a tendency to abuse the space available, with redundant splash-pages, needless gimmicks, obvious padding etc--for excellent examples of all these, see JLA ≠63. With more restricted space, the reasons, and opportunity, for this sort of thing vanish, and the writing nowadays is much tighter and to-the-point. I actually quite <u>approve</u> of the current size, as long as it doesn't keep on shrinking.

But most importantly, to me, there's the question of range. I enjoy, and wish to go on enjoying, mags like Aquaman, the Challs, Secret Society of Super-Villains, Jonah Hex, All-Star, Mr Miracle, Green Lantern, New Gods, etc--each in their <u>own</u> mag. Do away with the 35c size and you do away with most of those, the characters being consigned to back-up features in other mags, if they're lucky. And, no matter how many pages a back-up may have, no matter what proportion of the mag it may be given, a back-up is a back-up, something of secondary importance to the main feature. Now I never considered GL to be of lesser import than Flash, and it irked me no end when he was relegated to the back pages of that book. I think it would be disastrous if the others I've named, and more besides, were to be similarly treated...

Ah but, you may say, the 35c size mags aren't generally noted for their longevity --to which I would reply that the larger format books are even less noted for this trait, and generally the titles dropped of late have deserved to go, whereas if the 35c size was done away with, books that <u>don't</u> deserve to be dropped would be.

As I said at the onset, I thrive on being unfashionable, and if everyone else is unhappy with the 35c format, as <u>seems</u> to be the case, then it's only logical that I should take the opposite view. But it's not just contrariness, nor conservatism; I do genuinely like, enjoy and admire the bulk of the current 35c magazines.

And I'd just rather they did not get taken away from me...

...sigh... -KW

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MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL ≠1 (September)
"Kiss" by Steve Gerber, Al Weiss, John & Sal Buscema, Rich Buckler & Al Milgrom

Well, put it this way; with a beautiful cover by Al Weiss & Gray Morrow, all the talent listed above, Dr Doom, and the most outlandish, daring, innovative new rock band-superhero group (?) around, it just couldn't miss. Printed on high quality paper and in colour, too -- sheesh!

People said Howard The Duck was unusual, original, refreshing? Wait till they see this! The Gerber satire-and-yet-serious style of writing which was in HTD's first solo stories is here, now, and it's never been better! The idea is linked to the Marvel Universe, too--Steve cleverly takes care of that. It'd really be hard to get across even the basic storyline in this review, so I won't even try to do so. I will just say this: if you liked early HOWARD THE DUCK -- you'll like this.

The art ranges from excellent to very good--the overall effect is indeed fine, but for continuity's sake, one artist (and perhaps another inker) would have been better. Still, it's not bad at all.

By the way, in case anyone thinks otherwise, this is not a book about a rock band who become superbeings when there's danger around; they don't rush off-stage from a concert to fight crime. A word to the wise, and all that.

I did feel the book could have been improved by giving the comic section more pages, 60 instead of 40, ideally. The photos etc weren't bad, but being more of a comic fan than a rock fan, I'd have liked more comics. So, for $1.50 we get 40 pages of colour comics, a lovely wrap-around cover, 12 pages of photos and features, some ads (for Air Latveria?), and an editorial by Steve Gerber. Not bad value at all, I say--what about the rest of you? -Ken Moore

DC SPECIAL SERIES ≠1 (1977)
"5-STAR SUPERHERO SPECTACULAR"

Never mind the other four stories in this Dollar Comic (which aren't bad, mind you), this is worth getting for the Batman story alone. Batman versus Kobra, with art by Nasser and Rubinstein that's more like Adams than Adams is--what more could you ask for...? -Liam Wilks

INVADERS ≠20 (September)
"The Battle of Berlin" by Roy Thomas, Frank Robbins & Frank Springer

As seen in the last panel of ≠19, Union Jack is back. The crew get into another scrap with Warrior Woman and Master Man, but the real gem this time around is a reprint--please stop groaning, it's from MARVEL COMICS ≠1 (the first Timely Comic --1939), 8 pages of the Submariner by Bill Everett. So, unless your premium bond's come up and you can afford the original comic, what are you waiting for? -RAW

MR MIRACLE 19 (Sept) "It's All In the Mine" by Steve Englehart, Rogers & Hunch

Superb! Very good scripting indeed. I read in a recent letter from Steve Englehart published in a 'zine that he was going to make a lot of changes, like getting rid of Mother Box, and telling us how MM escapes the traps; at first, these changes seem to be for the worse, but they really have worked here.

Marshall Rogers has a really nice art style, imposing small one-figure drawings over large, squarely-lettered sound effects, and it works, although his pencils are a little sketchy at times. This book is a return that Englehart, Rogers and Hunch should well be proud of. Well done! -Matthew Vaughan

Not good enough, Messrs Englehart and Rogers; you've forgotten who the star of this strip was--I refer of course to Big Barda...

I don't know whose offence was greater, Marshall R's for failing to draw her in the proper proportions (I'd have thought most artists would have leapt at the chance...), or Steve E's for subjecting her to Comic-book Cliché No. 1, viz: the hero's girl is kidnapped and held hostage --Steve Englehart, how could you? To do it at all is bad enough, but to have Big Barda overpowered and kidnapped! Forgive him, Lord, 'cause I don't think I shall.

However. Let's look on the bright side: the mag's now much better drawn & scripted (if not necessarily plotted) than under Kirby; the escapes are not only explained, they're almost believable; and the backgrounds and special effects are done very nicely indeed (even when he's patently swiping, MR swipes well--take pg 10 panel 2, for instance). Plus, of course, you get a lot more content...

My trouble is I'm greedy; I always want perfection. Ignore what I said -- buy the mag, it's damned good. -K. Williams

JOHN CARTER, WARLORD OF MARS ≠4 (Sept)
"Raiding Party" by Wolfman, Kane & Nebres

Although both ERBooks appeal to me, it is obvious now that this book is the dominating one. The art is amazing (see the splash page of ≠3), and the dialogue is extremely good, too. Marv Wolfman seems to have captured the heart and soul of JC, and is using his talents to the full. A great package all round. -Matthew Vaughan

HUMAN FLY ≠1 (September)
"Death-Walk" by Bill Mantlo & Lee Elias

Meretricious rubbish served up with a generous helping of nauseating hypocrisy. Avoid like the plague.

(How's that for short & sweet?) -KW

VAMPIRELLA ≠62 (August) - $1.25

A fair Vampi tale, in which she regains her sight, with the help of Starpatch (?). Surely Vamps deserves more than 10 pages per issue, and the fact that the present story-line is not to continue until ≠65 doesn't do much for continuity.

Other stories include "U.F.O." by Toutain and Torrents, a nice, if inconclusive tale, a poorly illustrated and drawn-out story "Beautiful Screamer" by Jones & Sanchez, a strange and lavishly illoed yarn by Boudreau & Maroto in "Time Ticket", "Fog" (which is more dangerous than it might seem, as it dissolves flesh) by Cuti, Infantino & Giordano, and, finally, a war/voodoo tale by Boudreau & Sanchez, "By Treason's Knife".

Not a bad issue, but more Vampirella would be appreciated. -Laurence Bowkett

SHOWCASE ≠94 (September)
"The DOOM PATROL Lives Forever"
by Paul Kupperberg & Joe Staton

Not unless the stories improve it won't. I won't mention that Celsius, Tempest and Negative Woman are all swipes of existing characters; I'll just say the "Doc" who reconstructs Robotman must be Will Magnus --and ask why did he make him look so much like Rog-2000? -Robin A! Webster

IRON FIST ≠15 (September)
"Enter, the X-Men" by Chris Claremont, John Byrne & Dan Green

Oh, dear. The last issue. The last issue of by no means the lesser of the 2 Marvel martial arts colour comics. Why does MOKF sell better than IRON FIST? At least I.F. will co-star in POWER MAN from ≠48 on.

Chris, John and Dan, many thanks for a fine comic. It is a very fitting issue to end with, an excellently written & drawn comic. Since Chris & John took over this series, it has gone beyond the promise that Roy Thomas, Gil Kane & Dick Giordano gave it, way back in MARVEL PREMIERE ≠17. It is obvious that a great deal of care has gone into producing this book, and for that reason I need make no tribute to the creators. This labour of love, the book itself, is there, and it says all that has to be said. Amen! -Ken Moore

BUSTER & MONSTER FUN (16th July) - 8p

I haven't got around to the comic comic weeklies yet in "Made In Britain", so I didn't know that among "Gums" ("a shark worse than its bite"), "Ivor Lott & Tony Broke", "The Spritely Lads", and others too humorous to mention were a couple of adventure strips, including "The Leopard from Lime Street", a bona fide superhero! I'd like to thank John Knight for letting me know. "After being scratched by a radioactive leopard, 13 year-old Billy Farmer found that he had somehow developed the strength and agility of the mighty jungle cat" -- plus a sickly aunt and "leopard's sixth sense". A cross between Spider-Man and Hellcat? Take a look. -Ruan Lanihorne

PLASTIC MAN ≠19 (September)
"The Mouse That Soared" by John Albano, Ramona Fradon & Bob Smith

In the past few issues of this title, I've felt that while reading the story, I'm expected to laugh. Well, that is no longer absolutely true, for I feel I have to laugh now. With Albano on story rather than Skeates, I think the book has swung toward straight Jack Cole humour.

The plot this time centres around Marty Meeker, the "Mouse" of the title, becoming a superhero. Old hat though it might seem in conception, it's handled very well by Albano and Fradon (with Smith, of course).

I think the reason this book has been improving is not because the creative team wishes to imitate Jack Cole; rather, they are imitating Will Eisner. Both facial expressions and certain positions of the bodies seem to indicate that Fradon wishes to give the book the "Spirit" feel. Not that there is anything wrong with that, mind you, it's just that I think Albano and Fradon really ought to try to give Plas a more individual feeling--after all, if we wanted the Spirit, we'd buy the Spirit, and not Plastic Man.

Despite these minor gripes, Plastic Man has remained an interesting book to watch --however, the book is being cancelled as of ≠20. From the way they were begging for more letters on the letters page, I had guessed the book hadn't long left. -JG

RAMPAGING HULK ≠4 (August)
"The Other Side of Night" by Warner, Starlin & Nino, plus "Return From Oblivion" by Warner, Mayerik & Trinidad

A mystic whips Greeny off to his planet to avenge its civilisation's destruction. He conserves his power, as Hulk combats Trolls, Demons & Behemoths, for the final denouement -- the end of a star! A nice story, plotted by Starlin, whose pencils are sometimes hidden, sometimes excelled by Alex Nino's ever-unique inking. The Bloodstone story again comes second, as Ulysses mentally battles the Five. The art is not what we've come to expect from Val Mayerik, but as it does say "finishing & inking" by Trinidad, perhaps I shouldn't expect too much. Add a Gallery of Villains (art by Giffen) and you've got a nice package. And next issue, the Hulk versus the Sub-Mariner! -Laurence Bowkett

CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN ≠82 (Sept)
"The Lurker Below" by Gerry Conway, Mike Nasser & Joe Rubinstein

Now this is more like how the Challs should be. The stint in Super-Team Family was distinctly unimpressive; but this is something else again. Not only Adams-esque art (enough to make me happy by itself), but a story distinguished by continuity (internal & external) and an element of genuine stomach-turning horror, courtesy of SWAMP THING ≠8...a magazine that gave me nightmares at the time...

Of course I do have some reservations, like: why does everything still have to happen to Prof? That's a hangover from the bad old days. And where was Swamp Thing, then? Three panels of flashback hardly count. (And why Richard Nixon as the tractor seller? Oblique reference to his 'used-car salesman' image, or is it just whimsy?) (Is that strictly relevant, K?) (No...)(I didn't think so...)

Anyway... Interesting... -K. Williams

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA ≠146 (Sept)
"Inner Mission" by Steve Englehart, Dick Dillin & Frank McLaughlin

The Phantom Stranger returns Supes and Hawkman to life (see last ish!) and brings back with him...the Red Tornado. Actually, Reddy is under the control of Construct (yes, him again), but after a chase that leads the Leaguers from Atlantis to Paradise Island to New York, he's restored to his normal self, and to JLA membership--a certain Shayera also gains that accolade by the way. Englehart's scripts get better and better ('Deus ex Machina' exclaims Red, as he conks out after proving the other Leaguers can't catch him!) -- next issue includes the JLA, JSA and LSH, but excludes SE, sadly! -Laurence Bowkett

GODZILLA ≠2 (Sept)
"Thunder in the Darkness" by Moench, Trimpe, Giacoia & Tuska

"Issue ≠2 will be the same", Matthew Vaughan said in Bem 14 about the first issue--he was right. The most interesting part is the cover, which appears at first glance to show Godzilla eating a giant hamburger; no "Hostess Twinkies" strip, even. Issue 3 will be the same, and 4, and 5... -RAW

SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE ≠6 (Sept)
stories by John Albano & Jack Oleck, art by Talaoc, Rubeny & Jodloman

Well, it seems as if the "Slump" in horror popularity is over, as DC revives one of the better mystery titles of several months ago. And it would have been better if they hadn't bothered.

There just seems to be no inspiration on the DC mystery books, for they keep turning out repetitive plots that we've seen so many times before in their other titles. In my opinion, DC have yet to produce anything that even equals the poorest story of their major competitor in the field, Warren Magazines. Perhaps they ought to get hold of the likes of Bruce Jones, Roger McKenzie and other Warren writers who seem to be the only ones in the field who know how to write decent, innovative mystery/horror tales.

The art this issue isn't too bad, as Talaoc gives us his usual fine work for a tale about a vampire that we've seen in about a dozen other titles. I have never truly liked Rubeny's material -- it seems too repetitive and uninspired, but perhaps that's because of the trite plots that he has to work with. The best job this issue is Jodloman's piece, his art seems to be totally unequalled in its portrayal of faces showing hatred or fear.

Not only are there the problems I have mentioned already, but the lack of pages probably contributes to the lack of scope the writers have. I don't really think Orlando should have bothered with this, though; it probably won't last another issue at the rate it's going. Whatever the reason they had for bringing it back, it won't wash with the readers. -JG

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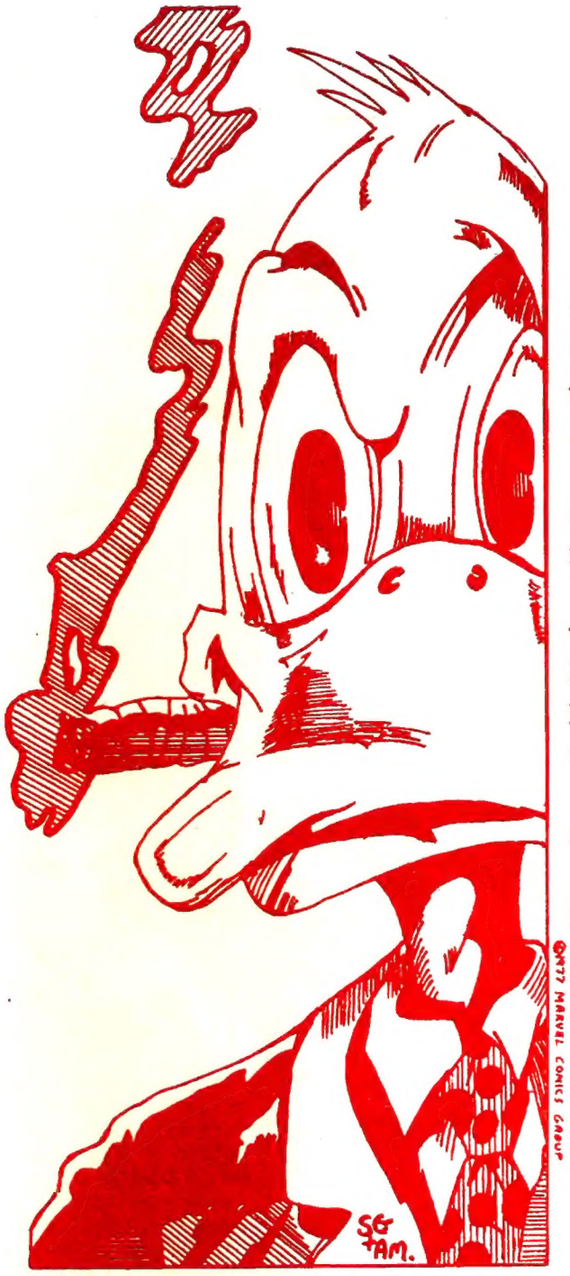

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No, that's not Alan Austin speaking; if Martin's got his layouts right, it is the gentleman on the right who laid down those words, in 2000 AD ≠20 the other week; Judge Dredd's the name, and protecting Mega-City One is his game, prowling the elevated highways on his mean motorbike. With its tongue-in-cheek approach and assured art, Dredd is my favourite strip in 2000 AD now--and despite the recent price increase to 9p, 2000 AD's my favourite British weekly.

Most of the "Summer Specials" are out now, with longer stories than the regular weekly titles--and, normally, rather less value. However, some interesting items do turn up in the back pages.

POPEYE HOLIDAY SPECIAL (30p) is full of 38 Bud Sagendorf sunday pages, plus four full-colour single-pagers and a feature or two; MIGHTY TV COMIC HOLIDAY SPECIAL (30p) features such stalwarts as Droopy, Mighty Moth, Tom & Jerry, Pink Panther, Barney Bear, Basil Brush, Hagar, Popeye, TV Terrors, and Texas Ted, plus a "Star Trek" dice game and, the longest story in the book, 3 full pages of Dr Who in "The Sky Warrior". Both specials are 48 pages.

Despite the cut-back in Disney weeklies of late, there are still a couple of Uncle Walt's specials out--the strip-orientated one is MICKEY MOUSE HOLIDAY SPECIAL, which is one of the slimmest books out, with 40 pages for 30p. Of course, the panels of the original American art have been cut up & rearranged to double the ammount of story per page, so stories featuring Super Goof, Mickey, Chip 'n' Dale, Scamp, Donald & Daisy, the Beagle Boys, O'Malley & the Alley Cats, and Li'l Bad Wolf are fitted in, plus features and a Jubilee centre-fold colour poster. All recent material; a much more interesting selection could be made so easily!

The last four are all 64 pages--and full marks go to VALIANT SUMMER SPECIAL for charging only 25p. Old titles may die--Valiant is now absorbed into Battle--but specials still appear! A 6-page "One-Eyed Jack" strip leads it off, and other items of interest include 6-pagers featuring "Adam Eterno", "Paco", and "Janus Stark", while "Kid Pharaoh" wrestles his way into 10; on the funny front, do the names "The Wild Wonders", "Captain Hurricane" (he is meant to be humorous, I trust...?), "The Nutts", "Mowser", and "Billy Bunter" mean anything to you? LION HOLIDAY SPECIAL has "Trelawny of the Guards", and rather too many text and general knowledge features --but a prize in ten pages of "Fraser of Africa" by Frank Bellamy. One trick to watch out for in these specials is used here--the cover promises "Robot Archie", but he's only in a text story. This trick is also used in ACTION SUMMER SPECIAL for "Spinball". "Hookjaw" is on hand though, plus "Dredger", a few fillers, and a cross between the Challengers of the Unknown & Rip Hunter, "The Legend Testers" -- in 11 pages, the spirit of those old Showcase issues lives on. I assume that it's a reprint--does anyone know where from?

2000 AD SUMMER SPECIAL SUPERCOMIC (like the previous two, 30p) has an excellent cover, and a rather stilted "Judge Dredd" 6-pager, by Kev O'Neill, plus a demonstration that without Dave Gibbons "Harlem Heroes" aren't half as good. "Invasion", "Dan Dare", "M.A.C.H. 1", and even "Flesh" are also on hand, along with a 2000 AD colour poster, a "Star Wars" preview, and as token reprint the 11-page first story of "The Phantom Patrol", a World War II infantry patrol lost in time, with a tank and landing craft.

The summer specials are nice and thick, much more collectable than the weeklies, with longer, complete stories and old strips that really show up some of the current product--it's a shame that they're such comparably poor value. There's more reading, and less filler material, in two issues of a comic than in its special, at about half the price!

But I promised you Asterix this time, so let's pretend my logo reads "Translated In Britain", and proceed to talk about France's premier comics series, which has been going now for nigh on twenty years, created & continued by Goscinny and Uderzo. The pint-size, indominable Gaul has been published in the UK for half that time, translated by Anthea Bell & Derek Hockridge -- with the puns and word-play, that's not an easy task. These are the books:

(1) "Asterix The Gaul"
(2) "Asterix And The Golden Sickle"
(3) "Asterix And The Goths"
(4) "Asterix The Gladiator"
(5) "Le Tour De Gaule"
(6) "Asterix And Cleopatra"
(7) "Asterix And The Big Fight"
(8) "Asterix In Britain"
(9) "Asterix Et Les Normandes"
(10) "Asterix The Legionary"
(11) "Asterix And The Chieftain's Shield"
(12) "Asterix At The Olympic Games"
(13) "Asterix And The Cauldron"
(14) "Asterix In Spain"
(15) "Asterix And The Roman Agent"
(16) "Asterix In Switzerland"
(17) "The Mansions Of The Gods"
(18) "Asterix And The Laurel Wreath"
(19) "Asterix And The Soothsayer"
(20) "Asterix En Corse"
(21) "Asterix And Caesar's Gift"
(22) "Asterix And The Great Crossing"

That's the order to read them in, the order they appeared in in France; numbers 5, 9 and 20 haven't been translated (yet) as the in-jokes about France wouldn't mean much to a British audience, while number 21 is forthcoming. And let's not forget the "Dogmatix" series for the young, or the four press-out books! I expect there are some new titles out in France by now --my sources aren't up to date, I regret.

Luckily, a Brighton reader wrote to let me know of a new Asterix book, slightly larger and more expensive than the regular albums--"Les 12 Travaux d'Asterix", which translates as "The 12 Labours of Asterix". It's not in comics form, but text, with large illustrations -- it ties in with an Asterix cartoon film. (Thanks, Wonderweed -- your LoC and review may have been too late, but your news was very useful!) I remember seeing the first book on TV as a short cartoon series -- but will we see a dubbed version of this new film in British cinemas soon, I wonder?

In 50 BC, the Gauls had been conquered by the Legions of Rome -- except for one small village, surrounded by fortified Roman camps. Thanks to a special potion brewed by the druid Getafix, the villagers have superhuman strength; Asterix, our hero, is a shrewd, cunning little warrior to whom all perilous missions are given, while Obelix, his inseparable companion, is a giant of a fellow who delivers twelve foot tall stone menhirs for a living. He alone doesn't need the magic potion--as a child he fell into a vat of it, and was permanently effected by it. And of course there's Cacofonix the bard, Vitalstatistix the tribe's chief, a centurion rejoicing in the name Crismus Bonus, and lots more memorable characters --all embroiled in a series of fantastic and funny adventures. A good Asterix book is the best in comic comedy--and Uderzo's art, while suitably cartoony, conveys the spirit of the times, be it Gaul's rolling landscapes or Rome's bright, shining architecture. You don't get much change out of £2 for a new hard-back edition (in the 8½" x 11½" size), but many titles are available, still in full colour as paperbacks half that size for 50p. I can certainly recommend them.

In brief: Dez Skinn's HOUSE OF HAMMER continues on its monthly way, but ≠11 has only 10 pages of comics ("The Gorgon", drawn by Trev Goring & Alberto Cuyas, is the main feature); the DAN DARE OF 2000 AD POSTER MAGAZINE, while not exactly good value, has the splash page from 2000 AD ≠12 as poster, plus other snippets of art from the Frank Hampson age and today; in the HoH format is a special SINBAD AND THE EYE OF THE TIGER magazine, with a 16-page strip adaptation of the film; BULLET now has not only 8 or 9 pages of "Fireball" per week, but also 3 pages of the crime-fighter's adventures as a teenager, "Young Fireball", as well, putting him in the same class as Spider-Man for pages per month; have you seen a 40p monthly semi-poster magazine called SHATTER? Issue 2, besides Clint Eastwood, has a short comic strip "The Sky Demon" by John Albano & Al McWilliams -- reprinted from Seaboard's BLAZING BATTLE TALES ≠1.

And that ends another column. Where I go from here depends on your information and suggestions, so do please keep the comments coming!

RUAN LANIHORNE

FAN-THINGS

The trouble with doing a regular column like this is that one finds oneself each and every time gazing at the same faithful old regular fanzines. There are changes, of course; a couple of zines fold, and a promising newcomer or two bursts onto the scene. ULTIMATE SCIENCE FICTION ≠1 20p from Neil Bailey & Steve Dillon.

was one of the nicest surprises to come my way of late--behind the colour cover is a science fiction orientated stripzine, with as the lead feature the first instalment of the story of the Dobering Dynasty, by Steve Dillon. A dash of Trigan Empire, a touch of Foundation Trilogy -- I enjoyed it.

A "press release" from Howard Stangroom states that "due to difficulties in 'management/labour relations', Howard and the YANCY STREET JOURNAL have parted company with P. J. Evans, their publisher and distributor. This means there'll be no further copies of the Journal for the present." Howard goes on to say that he's taking over COMIXINE from Marc Baines, and all material intended for YSJ, and all subscriptions, will be moved over--for CX 4, send 49p to Howard,

and expect Alan Hunter, Mike Cruden, K. Williams, Alan McKenzie, and Kathleen Glancy to fall through your letterbox in due course. Sounds okay, eh? I must stress that this version of the parting of the ways is Howard's, not Mr Evans' -- I find it strange, if things are as he says, that Howard isn't continuing YSJ itself, rather than in effect disguising it as Comixine.

A new FANTASY TRADER is out now--issue 26, featuring "Spiderman Revisited"--not an article, rather a collection of letters of comment on an article Mike published back in 1973! Add the real lettercol, and "A Letter For Fantasy Trader", and there you have it--8 pages of letters, 18 pages of ads, and the cover, for 17p by post from Mike Cruden.

The main adzine at the moment, though, has to be COMICS UNLIMITED--its monthly schedule means ads get published right away, and a 2000 circulation means that a lot of people see 'em. Add 20 or so pages of features & articles per month, such as in ≠45 "Fan Spotlight" on Jean-Daniel Breque and "Perusals of Problems Posed by Paranormal Persons" by Maureen James & Paul Jay, "1976 Marvel Comics Review" (conclusion) by Richard Ashford, and the regular features, and you have a good reason to lash out £2 on twelve issues; the address of course is Alan Austin.

GALAXY-Z ≠2 is out now, at 22p by post from Phil Hartley.

with a Martin Dutton cover, the debut of Steven Green's new "Reality Plus" information col, and more; the zine needs working on, especially the layouts, but it shows potential.

But, time now to preview KIDZ STUFF ≠2, which should be out in time for the Con in September; I gather they've promised an ad for this issue, so I needn't go into any great detail -- if you order before the end of October, it's 40p post free from Hunter Tremayne. There are five all-new strips in the 40 pages (no ads), along with a Power Girl centre-spread, a bumper lettercol, and various features on the alternative comics around. Hunter is confident that lurking inside the four-colour cover will be "the best British fanzine ever" -- can he do it? Stay tuned to this column and find out next time!

Other zines out in time for Comicon 77 include a new Panelologist, and of course COMIC MEDIA NEWS; the exceedingly cheap printer both zines have been using lately has discontinued its print service, so price rises are likely--in fact, CMN has already announced it's going to rise to 30p an issue right away. They've got two new interviews on file, conducted by Nick Landau in New York recently -- Neal Adams and Mike Gold. Also due out by September 3rd is COMIC MEDIA NEWS SPECIAL: MODESTY BLAISE, at an as yet undecided price. In 32 CMN-size pages is the first half of a strip adventure, "Top Traitor" (including, but going beyond, the strips printed in Comic Media 11), plus the 12-strip origin of Modesty Blaise (as seen in CM 9), a feature on Modesty's original artist Jim Holdaway, and probably something on the film. And then, a few months later, a second special will finally conclude "Top Traitor". As I said, I don't know how much Richard will be asking for these specials, but CMN ≠32 will be 32p by post from R. Burton.

SKY WOOD is a low circulation, photo-copied groundlevel comic produced by Mark McKenzie and Donald Barr; to obtain the July issue, with two illustrated poems, just send a 7p stamp and a large (7" x 9" minimum) envelope -- it's not your money they're after, it's your reaction they'd like to get. Me? I rather liked it, and I hope to see more issues. The address is D. Barr.

Rather more ambitious is TALES OF TOMORROW, published by the Norwich "Mr Tomorrow" shop -- Jerry Rees was kind enough to get a copy for Bem of ≠1, February, which has 36 pages for 20p by post, better make it 30p --;

the first strip, "Starak" by Mark Starling, is quite enjoyable; the other three are marred by poor spelling, but still quite interesting, I hope there are more issues to come. Maybe other comic shops will also become patrons of the arts? It's certainly a nice idea.

But, let us hop across the Atlantic, for BATMANIA ≠23, from Rich Morrissey; I gather Martin Lock will have copies for sale shortly. The main feature is a new interview with Gardner Fox, one of the all-time great comics scripters. Add art by both Greg Chown & Superswipe, and an article by Martin Lock, and you'll feel quite at home, believe me! Now, a brief note for Comics Heroine Fan Club members --the organisation is back in action, with a new "The Adventuress" out, and the first new "Heroine Addict" due any moment. If you're interested in joining, send Martin (their British Agent) an S.A.E.

Joe Matthews

promises CREATION ≠2 very soon, and, along with Phil Hartley, DIMENSION X this autumn. The prices I'm not sure of--about 20p each, I would guess. And that fills the space up nicely -- have you joined THE SOCIETY OF COMICS ENTHUSIASTS yet...? -Ed Sallis

3.
The Adventures of STANGROOM the WOODPECKER
DISILLUSIONED BY HIS EXPERIENCES UNDERGROUND, STAN GROOM SITS PERCHED ATOP ONE OF LONDON'S MANY MONUMENTS...
GLOOM
I MAY AS WELL FACE IT! I'LL NEVER BE A BIG NAME IN COMICS LIKE SPIDER-MAN, RUPERT THE BEAR OR KATHLEEN GLANCY!
PARDON ME YOUNG WOODPECKER! AM I TO UNDERSTAND THAT YOU TOO ARE A FAILURE IN THE WONDERFUL WACKY WORLD OF COMICS?
HMMM..MAYBE IF WE POOLED OUR RESOURCES AND MADE ONE LAST VALIANT ATTEMPT TO CRACK THE BRITISH MARKET!
AND SO, NEXT DAY...
I SAY! YOU LOOK SPIFFING! THIS IS JUST WHAT THE PUBLIC IS CRYING OUT FOR!
ER, MR GIFFOVER, YOU PROMISED ME THOUSANDS! IT'S NOT THAT I DOUBT YOU BUT...
OF COURSE! HERE'S YOUR ADVANCE. THOUSANDS OF BACK-ISSUES OF SALLY SLOPPER!
YOU DIDN'T THINK THE NEWSAGENTS WOULD KEEP THEM LYING AROUND FOREVER DID YOU?
I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND HOW I CAN FLY BUT IT'S CERTAINLY DRYER THAN JUMPING
EVEN MORE NEXT ISH

TALE-ENDERS

DC are putting out their usual selection of titles this month. JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #147 starts a two-issue tale with not only the JSA but also the LSH on hand to help the JLA face a "Crisis in the 30th Century", by Paul Levitz, Martin Pasko, Dick Dillin & Frank McLaughlin--it's not bad, but 19 superheroes in one story makes things get a bit crowded. And hurry back, Steve Englehart! Also in the 60c size is the 1st of DC's new annuals, alias DC Special Series volume 1 number 3--SGT ROCK SPECIAL. "Easy Is Missing" is the title of Rock's 30-page new adventure, by Bob Kanigher & Doug Wildey; I reckon it would make a nice film. The scene of Rock, the dog and the young French girl making their way down the tree-lined lane, and into the mine-field, is good--if Bob could get rid of some of the "Gotta plant this TNT egg where it'll do the most good" dialogue, though, it would be an improvement.

SHADE #3, by Steve Ditko, dialogued by Mike Fleisher, is an interesting book; I still can't see it reaching the bulk of the young comic readers, though. The art by Ditko is nice, and the concepts and story are intriguing; but with books like Isis, Metal Men, Starfire, Teen Titans, Plastic Man, Kung Fu Fighter and Ragman being cancelled, how long can this book continue on the schedules.

FLASH #254, entitled "To Believe Or Not To Believe", shows that, cared for by Cary Bates, Irv Novick & Frank McLaughlin, the Scarlet Speedster is doing very nicely. In what other comic would the hero's main foes club together to give him an award for keeping them on their toes, making them the sharpest villains ever? But they have still got something up their sleeves for next issue Flash won't like at all!

BRAVE & BOLD #137 has Batman joined by the least-used of Kirby's DC creations, the Demon, in a sequel to B&B #75, with art by John Calnan and Bob McLeod for the customary Haney script; strange...

I thought that putting AQUAMAN back in his own book meant we'd be given full-length stories; but #58 has only 11 pages of Michelinie/Aparo Aquaman, backed up by 6 pages of his wife Mera, by Kupperberg, Ortiz & Colletta. David and Jim are too busy to create 17 pages per 2 months, it seems--and at least we learn that Arthur Curry jr is not quite dead.

METAL MEN #54, by Gerry Conway and Joe Staton, begins a two-parter co-starring Green Lantern, with the rebelious robots walking out on Doc, and setting up house on their own--if only for two more issues. A shame, it's been an interesting title; but that's the way things go...

Still with Staton art (inked this time by Francisco Chiaramonte), we have the New Doom Patrol's second outing in SHOWCASE #95, written by Paul Kupperberg. It's the showdown with Immortus, along with a few revelations about Celsius, and 17 pages pass enjoyably enough; but do we need yet another super-group book?

As a last DC, how about TEEN TITANS #50? After all, any comic that brings back not only Lilith, Beast Boy, Hawk & Dove, and Golden Eagle (see JLA 116), but the first Bat-girl as well. Bob Rozakis wrote it, Don Heck (on a good day) pencilled it, and Joe Giella supplied the inks--with a dozen heroes for 17 pages, the saga of the Teen Titans West continues next month; so far, so good.

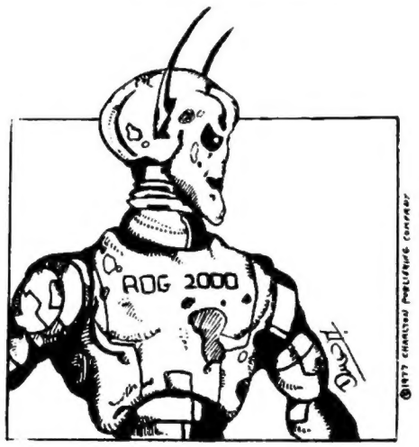
Let's not mess about--as a first Marvel, here comes MARVEL PREVIEW #11, with the second coming of Star-Lord; and this time, we've got a hit on our hands! John Byrne pencilled it, Terry Austin inked it, and Chris Claremont wrote it, all 52 pages of galaxy-wide high adventure; SF in comics has never looked better--or at least, not for 22 years! I would strongly suggest you get a copy...

Lots of annuals to review this month. HOWARD THE DUCK ANNUAL #1 will apparently come out over here at 30p--and with a delightful 34-page HTD adventure by Steve Gerber and Howard's first artist, Val Mayerik, it's certainly worth it. Flying carpets, oriental intrigue, and assorted Gerber touches make it indispensable, at shop or import prices. Apparently, this is the only Marvel Annual that will come over -- mainly, it's a trial to see what HTD's appeal is in the UK, so that Marvel can decide whether or not to give Howard a British Weekly of his very own. Which would stop the monthly coming over...

ETERNALS ANNUAL #1, by Jack Kirby and Mike Royer, features, along with Thena, Karkas and the Reject against a fellow called "Zakka, the Tool-Master", who is busily terrorizing New York by importing monsters from the past; while "Thunder In The 31st Century" is the title for THOR ANNUAL #6's 34-pager, teaming Thor with the Guardians of the Galaxy. Len Wein & Roger Stern wrote it, and Sal Buscema & Klaus Janson drew it. It's nice to see the Guardians back in action!

Both the ERB annuals are out now, too--TARZAN ANNUAL #1, by Thomas, Buscema and Steve Gan has two 15-page "Jungle Tales of Tarzan", framed by four pages of the grown-up Jungle Lord brooding on his past. I enjoyed the book; more exciting though is WARLORD OF MARS ANNUAL #1, in which Marv Wolfman, Sal Buscema and Ernie Chan adapt "The Ancient Dead" by Burroughs. A strange civilisation, strange sorceries, and John Carter's indominable fighting spirit make this a memorable tale.

SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #11 features "Spawn of the Spider", by Bill Mantlo, along with Don Perlin & Jim Mooney, for the first 28 pages, plus "Chaos at the Coffee Bean" by Scott Edelman, Johnny Romita Jr, and Al Milgrom, for the last 6. It's all, truth to tell, a trifle ordinary--a charge not to be levelled at the last annual of this septet, INVADERS ANNUAL #1. It starts with Alex Schomburg's first cover for Marvel for 30 years, and includes, besides the first and last chapter by the usual art team of Frank Robbins & Frank Springer, are chapters of solo action for the Human Torch (by Schomburg), Captain America (by Don Rico), and the Sub-Mariner (by Lee Elias & Frank Springer). And, as the cover says, just wait till you meet our nazi-smashing guest stars! Roy Thomas really caught me off-guard with them...



POWER MAN #47 is the last pre-Byrne, pre-Iron Fist issue, pitting our thick-skinned hero against Zzzax, who's more used to giving the Hulk a shocking time. Marv Wolfman has moved on, leaving Chris Claremont as scripter and Archie Goodwin as editor -- and it's certainly a step in the right direction. Talented though he is, Marv didn't seem to capture the spirit of Luke's strip.

STAR WARS #4 has Luke Skywalker rescue the princess, helped by Han Solo and his companion Chewie--and it has Ben Kenobi's final battle with Darth Vader. As I found with the "Logan's Run" serialisation, it makes a difference continuing after having seen the film (at a recent preview at the Dominion, Tottenham Court Road--it'll be starting its West End run there on 27th December) -- but don't worry, there's so much in the film that reading the comic first won't hurt your enjoyment at all.

MARVEL CLASSICS #23 has Don McGregor's adaptation of "The Moonstone" by Wilkie Collins, with art by Dino Castrillo--not quite "Killraven", but it's a relief to see his work in comics again. Also in the 50c size, but with ads, is THE ISLAND OF DR MOREAU, adapted by Doug Moench, Larry Hama & Jess Jodloman from the new film. A whole movie in 30 pages must mean that the thing's rather over-simplified; they are taking over 100 pages for "Star Wars" after all. This "Marvel Movie Special" is not likely to be imported, by the way.

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #32 has the Invisible Girl joining Ben, Spider-Woman and Alicia for the wrap-up of the current 3-parter; Ben's staying on in England a bit longer, though--rumour has it he's looking for a Mr Howard Stangroom...

HUMAN FLY #2 has, along with the Bill Mantlo script, art by Carmine Infantino & Dan Green; it's nice to see DC's one-time publisher back doing what he does best in four colours. Ghost Rider co-stars this time; and we're out of space. G'bye! -ML